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HARVEST

BY

JOHN STRANGE WINTER

AUTHOR OF "REGIMENTAL LEGENDS," "MIGNON," "CAVALRY LIFE," ETC.

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HARVEST.

By JOHN STRANGE WINTER.

“Every man’s harvest hereafter shall be according to his seed-time here.”—SCUPOLI.

CHAPTER I.

RACHEL POWER.

“God does not demand impossibilities. Do what you can.”

—ST. AUGUSTINE.

IN a large well-shaded room in an Indian bungalow a man lay sick unto death. He knew himself that he was dying, no one better, for he was an army surgeon and had seen many and many a poor fellow go out in just the way that he was going now, though, perhaps, he had seen none slip away quite so quickly; in fact, he was just saying so.

“It’s no use fretting about it, my woman,” he was saying to the girl who sat beside the bed and held one feeble hand in her young and hopeful strong one, while she patiently tried to fan a breath of air to his wasted lips with a palm-leaf which she held in the other; “I’ve got to the far end of my journey now.”

“But, dear,” urged the girl, “I don’t really believe it’s as bad as you think. Dr. Dealy himself told me this

morning that if I could only get a little strength and nourishment into you, we might get you up to the Hills, and likely enough you'd be as well as ever."

A smile flitted over the dying doctor's face.

"Dealy said—oh, my dear, Dealy was always an ass—I never knew a bigger. He means kindly enough; but all the same they are only false hopes that he is trying to buoy you up with, and nothing in this world ever came of false hopes—aye, or in the other, so far as I've ever heard, either."

"But you're better to-day, dear," the girl persisted, anxiously.

"Better! Am I? I didn't know; and I fancy I ought to know—best, dear. Better! No, no, little girl, I'm not only no better, *I'm much worse*; and it's better to face the fact bravely, and settle what to do, than to shirk the truth and leave everything unsaid that should be said."

It was a good deal for a man so ill as Dr. Power was to say at once, and he paused almost exhausted by the effort. His daughter did not break the silence, because at that moment she could not trust herself to speak.

"I wish I could have made a better provision for you, Rachel," Dr. Power went on after a few minutes.

"Don't think about that, dear," cried the girl, quickly. "I shall be all right; don't fear for me."

"But I do fear for you," he answered. "I know what the world is, and you don't. Until now you have always been able to live in fair comfort. You have had your trip to the Hills, your Ayah—everything needful for your comfort. But when I'm gone I don't know how it will be with you. I wish I'd been able to make a better provision for you. A *better* one," he went on

bitterly. "I might have left out that word, for I've not been able to make a provision of any kind."

"Don't say that, dear Father," Rachel cried, in distress. "I am young and strong and sensible, and you have given me a good education, and——"

"I wish you had married Forder," Dr. Power broke in.

"But I do not, I assure you. Colonel Forder is fifty and has four children, and he drinks, and his first wife died of a broken heart, they say. Oh, dear, darling father, *don't* wish that! I shall get on all right; and if my grandfather won't help me there is always my art."

"Oh! your art—mere child's play."

"Not at all. Two years' hard work in Rome is a better training than many a painter gets, I can tell you."

"And what can you know about it—you who have never even been home?"

"But I met a great many painters from home at Rome, and they told me almost everything. I know just what to do if General Vandeleur won't own me."

"But you'll go to him, Rachel? Promise me, my dear, that you'll go to him as soon as you can possibly get to him. Promise me that you'll let nothing tempt you from that course."

"I will go straight to him, I promise you," said Rachel, steadily. "Nothing shall tempt me from keeping that promise—nothing."

Dr. Power drew a long breath of relief. "I am sure it is the wisest thing to do, Rachel. After all, he is your mother's father, and though he disowned her he knew that I was there to take care of her. I think he will feel differently towards you, because you have nobody

to stand by you—nobody—nobody at all. And, after all, you're his own grandchild, Rachel — his only child's only child—and he knows that you have nobody —nobody in all the world."

"I am sure he will be very kind and nice to me, dear Father," answered Rachel, though her heart sank dolefully at the prospect of going all by herself to face the offended grandfather, who had been held up as an object of dread and terror to her ever since she could remember anything. "But, dear, should you not rest a little? You have talked so much, and it is wasting your strength, and taking away your only chance."

"Oh! I shall get rest enough by-and-bye," he replied, in a tone which brought the scalding tears gushing to the girl's tired eyes. "Still, I'll be quiet for half an hour or so. I suppose Dealy will be coming in again to look wise over me."

His opinion of his junior had never been a great one, and now that he had come to be in the depths of extreme illness, the poor opinion had deepened into something very like contempt. All the same, he was weary and exhausted, and he closed his eyes and dropped off to sleep in less time than it takes me to write these lines. For a few minutes his daughter sat quietly waving the palm leaf to and fro, and then, seeing that he was really sleeping, she rose and went out in search of the native servant whose special office that was.

It was then after five o'clock of the afternoon—the worst heat of the day was over, and Rachel, who had been up nearly all the night and was very tired, went out into the well-shaded veranda and told the servant whom she found there to bring her a cup of tea. Then,

with a long sigh she sank into a chair, and in two minutes was fast asleep.

How long she slept she never knew ; but it was fast growing dark when Dr. Dealy came out on to the veranda and gently touched her hand. "Miss Power," he said, softly.

Rachel awoke with a start, and, seeing the doctor bending over her, sprang up. "What is it?" she cried. "Is he worse?"

"My dear girl," said the other, "I am afraid——"

"Is he dead?" she gasped.

"No, not dead ; but in his sleep he has slipped into unconsciousness, and—it is kindest to tell you the truth, my dear—I am afraid he will never know you or recognise you again. I fear he is sinking fast."

Rachel turned swiftly away as if to re-enter the house, but the doctor caught her by the gown.

"Stay, Miss Power. I see there is tea put ready for you, but you have had none. You had better have something to eat and drink before you go into your father's room."

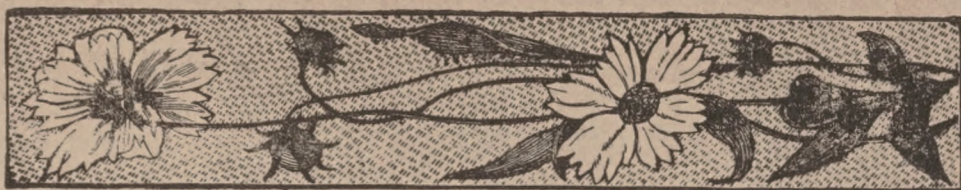
She stopped short. "Yes; if they will make me some fresh tea I will come out at once," she said ; "that is cold, and will do me no good ;" and then she passed on into the house, leaving him alone.

"Ah! poor girl; it's a sad blow for her," he muttered. "I wonder—Hi! Ramsee, get some fresh tea for the Mem-Sahib, will you? "Yes"—as the native disappeared—"it must be an awful blow for her. I wonder if there's any money—if she is provided for? I wonder if she'd have me if I asked her? By Jove! she never gave me a word or look of encouragement, but I've a good mind to try my luck—by Jove I have!"

While he was thus speculating about her, Rachel Power was standing beside her father's bed. She saw that it was but too true, and that he was unmistakably sinking fast. Quite motionless she stood at the foot of the bed watching the dear face over which the shadows of death were quickly creeping; and presently, when they came to tell her that the refreshment which Dr. Dealy had ordered for her was ready, she crept softly out and, after eating and drinking, crept as softly in again and took up her position once more without saying a single word.

So through the hours which followed she sat waiting for the end—a tall slim tired figure, with loosely-clasped slender hands and sweet soft eyes darkened with the shadow of sorrow.

It was not for long. Darker and darker fell the shadows over the face of the dying man, and more feeble and irregular grew his laboured breath; then, just as the tattoo rang out in the square of the barracks hard by, there was a sigh and a silence, and the lamp of Dr. Power's life had suddenly gone out.



CHAPTER II.

“WHAT MORE COULD I SAY?”

“Compel men to feel you are in earnest.”—

ROBERTSON.

“Prescribe to yourself an ideal, and then act up to it.”—

EPICTETUS.

IT is the custom in the shining East to put the dead away out of sight as quickly as possible, and accordingly all that was left of Dr. Power was carried with all the pomp and ceremony of a military funeral to the little graveyard of Jeypore, and there left in the undisturbed and tranquil quiet which we shall all know one day—or stay, we may not *know* it, though certain it is that we shall all have it.

It was an imposing sight, for the dead man had been unusually popular at Jeypore, and every European in the station had come to pay to his worn-out body the last honours and the respect which they had felt for him in life.

Of course, the whole of the troops quartered in the command were present, and in the midst of the procession came the gun-carriage with its sad burden covered by a pall borne by officers of Dr. Power's own rank, and bearing his sword and helmet and the medals which he had won in old Crimean days and in more

recent Afghan campaigns. Behind was led the dead man's charger, decked in funeral trappings of black and white, with boots reversed in the stirrups in token that he would never ride him again. And then there came the one mourner, Rachel Power, accompanied by several sympathetic ladies of the garrison and followed by a long string of officers of all ranks. So they passed down the road to the little graveyard (but a stone's throw from the Powers' bungalow) to the slow and solemn strains of the "Dead March," and presently the air was rent by the three volleys which told that all was over, except the last gay jingling air to which the troops would march back to barracks.

For Rachel there was nothing more to do now, only to take a last long look into the flower-decked grave which held her nearest and dearest upon earth, then to walk sadly back to the empty home which would be home to her but for a short time now.

She spoke not a word as she went; and at the door of the house one after another of the ladies who had returned with her bade her a quiet farewell and left her—all but one, who followed her within and put her arm kindly about her.

"My dear," she said, "the others have gone away at once because we all felt that you would be best left quietly alone just now. But you cannot stop here; come home with me and I promise you you shall be undisturbed as long as you like."

"Dear Mrs. Leroy," cried Rachel, gratefully, "you are all so good to me—too good. But I want to stop here as long as I may. I have been very happy here"—looking with sad tearless eyes round the pretty drawing-room—"and I may not have a home of my own for a

long time. I know how kind and good you are, and I thank you as my poor darling would thank you if he knew—but I want to stop here alone.”

“My dear girl, you cannot *sleep* here alone,” returned the older woman, decidedly, “it is utterly out of the question and impossible.”

“Oh! please—please—”

“My dear; I would suggest nothing to trouble you,” Mrs. Leroy said, kindly; “but remember you are *alone* now, and, as I say, you cannot sleep in this house by yourself or with only native servants. But if you would rather stop, come in to us in the evening after dinner, and you can be here during the day as much as you choose.”

Eventually, this was what Rachel consented to do, and Mrs. Leroy went away to her own house, leaving her alone. Poor child, it was not for long that this arrangement lasted; for in the land of the pagoda-tree the homes are easily put together and as easily broken up, the affairs of those who die in harness are set in order so quickly that to our slower minds there seems something of indecency in such haste. So with the affairs of Dr. Power—almost before Rachel realized that he had been taken away, she was compelled to leave the roof under which she had been so happy, for ever, and seek the friendly shelter of Mrs. Leroy’s house.

She did not, however, go there, except to sleep, until the day immediately before the sale of her father’s belongings, and Mrs. Leroy met her with an apology on her lips.

“My dear Rachel, I hope you won’t be very angry with me, but I have asked Dr. Dealy to dinner to-night.”

"Oh! no, Mrs. Leroy, why should I be angry?" Rachel answered. "I shall have to get used to seeing people you know. Why, in another fortnight I shall be on board the P. and O. steamer, and there will be no chance of shutting myself up then."

"No, that is true. Well, dear, I am glad you don't mind. Dealy is a nice fellow, and was devoted to your poor father, and I think your father had a very high opinion of him."

The first smile that had been seen on Rachel Power's face flitted across her lips then, for she remembered but too well the way in which her dear lost one had last spoken of Dr. Dealy—"Dealy said—oh! my dear, Dealy was always an ass—I never knew a bigger."

However, she said nothing to her hostess, only repeated her assurance that she should be very glad to meet Dr. Dealy at dinner. And in due time Dr. Dealy came—a long, lankey, kindly man; not very wise, perhaps, but undoubtedly overflowing with all manner of goodness. And yet, oh! how the sight of him brought all the first pains of her new grief back to the girl's heart—he might be, nay, she knew that he was, all that was good and kind, but he was such a contrast to her handsome genial father, with his great broad shoulders and his great rich voice and the great heart which knew just what to say and what to leave unsaid—the father who had been everybody's friend and nobody's enemy, not even his own.

Until dinner was over Rachel had no suspicion that Dr. Dealy was anything but an ordinary guest—or, I should say, that there had been any special purpose in his coming. Yet cleverly enough, soon after she and Rachel left the table and went into the drawing-room,

Mrs. Leroy managed to efface herself, making some trivial pretence for her absence, so careless and so trivial as to arouse no suspicion in Rachel's mind that there was a special meaning in it.

Nor even when Dr. Dealy came in from the dining-room alone did she at all guess what was coming, although, if she had once looked at his anxious face with a less preoccupied mind than hers was at that moment, she could scarcely have failed to be enlightened.

"You are all alone," he remarked, not because he wanted to remind her of the fact, but only because he was unusually nervous and could not think of anything else to say.

Rachel looked up from her work—for she was an industrious creature, who found it impossible to sit with her hands idly before her, and, when there was neither enough light nor a proper opportunity for following the art which was the passion of her life, she had generally some elaborate piece of embroidery on hand, and only the previous evening she had started to work a beautiful tablecloth which would last until the journey home would be at an end.

"Yes," she answered, "Mrs. Leroy has gone away for a minute, but she won't be long. You must try and put up with me till she comes back; but"—with a sad little sigh—"I am afraid I shall prove a very dull person to talk to, though I used to be entertaining enough."

Her words gave the doctor the chance he was anxiously awaiting. "Miss Power," he began, eagerly yet very humbly, "I know I'm a poor devil—at least, that is, I'm not worthy of you in any way; but—but

I've loved you for a long time, and if you would only take me, I'd give all the rest of my life to make you a good husband. It shouldn't be my fault if you weren't the happiest woman in India. Miss Power—Rachel—say that you will?"

He had come so near to her in his anxiety and eagerness that he was almost kneeling before her; and Rachel, with something almost like a cry of horror, recoiled from him.

"Get up, Dr. Dealy," she exclaimed. "I beg—I implore you to get up—I insist upon it. I—I—cannot listen to this. Please don't say another word—not another word."

Her tone and gestures were so urgent that he obeyed, but he pushed a chair close to her and tried to take her hand. "Rachel," he said, humbly, "you are not going to refuse me?"

"But indeed I am," she cried. "How could you think of suggesting such a thing? I, in trouble and my dear one but just taken from me. I think it is most inconsiderate and unkind of you. You might have known—you *ought* to have known that I should be sure to say no."

There were tears in her eyes, and tears in her voice too, and her pretty white hands were trembling violently. Dr. Dealy, however, blundered on, if the truth be told, plunging deeper and deeper into the mire of her displeasure and distress at each step he took.

"I always meant to ask you," he urged, miserably, "only I never had quite courage enough to risk your friendship. And it is only because your poor father is gone, and you are left alone and unprotected, that I

dared suggest it. I did not mean to be inconsiderate and unkind, Rachel, I'm sure you know that as well as I do; but there's nothing on earth that I wouldn't do for you if I could, and—and I thought, being left alone, it would be better to speak out to-night, and then if you wanted anything buying at the sale to-morrow, for our house, why, I could buy it, and you wouldn't be disappointed and be sorry you hadn't been able to tell me about it in time."

At this point Rachel Power burst out crying for the first time since her father's death; but for all that she was not deprived of the power of speech; on the contrary, indeed, the outburst seemed to have loosened her frozen tongue.

"How dare you mention to-morrow?" she broke out, dashing her tears away with her hand and flashing an indignant glance at him. "*Our* house! how dare you talk about *our* house when you know I never gave you a word of encouragement in my life—how dare you? No, I shall not be disappointed, and you know perfectly well that I wouldn't marry a prince or promise to, which is the same thing, within a week of my darling's death—if you don't know it you ought to."

"But Rachel, dear," he urged——

"*Don't* call me 'Rachel' or 'dear,'" she cried, passionately. "I am not 'Rachel' to you, or 'dear' either. And don't presume to say again that I am alone and unprotected—I am neither. I am going home to my own relatives as quickly as I can get my things together."

"Your relatives!" Dr. Dealy exclaimed in such genuine and blank amazement that Rachel's anger was aroused again. "Why," he said, simply, "I didn't

know that you had any relatives. I've heard your father say so dozens of times."

This was the last straw to the already much-tried burden of Rachel Power's patience. She rose from her chair and gathered her table-cloth into a bundle under her arm, then she drew herself to her full height and fixed him with blazing eyes.

"You are mistaken, sir," she said, with dignity. "My father certainly never told you that *I* had no relations; he could not, for it would not have been true, and my father never spoke other than the truth. When I leave Jeypore I am going straight home to my mother's father, General Vandeleur." And before her astonished hearer could recover himself, she had swept out of the room, and he was left alone.

In two minutes Mrs. Leroy, with many a warning rustle and cough, entered by the door opposite to that by which Rachel had taken her departure.

"Well?" she asked, eagerly. "Is it all right?"

"All right, Mrs. Leroy—No, it is all wrong," he answered, ruefully.

"What! did she say no?" the lady cried in astonishment.

In the midst of his dismay the Doctor could not help laughing. "Yes, that she did; and, by Jove, she slated me soundly for daring to suggest such a thing. It's all up, Mrs. Leroy; I never had a chance from the beginning. I shall never marry now."

"Slated you?" cried Mrs. Leroy.

"Yes. I always thought—until now—that however much a lady disliked a man who asked her to marry him, that she at least looked upon the offer as a compliment; Miss Power doesn't even do that."

"Oh! she did not mean it," cried the older lady, soothingly. "She is unnerved and unhinged by all this terrible business—small wonder too, poor girl; I know I feel utterly upset myself. But you must wait a few days, and try her again; if a woman is worth asking once, you know, she is worth asking twice."

"That is so; but I shall never ask Miss Power again, Mrs. Leroy," returned the Doctor, shaking his head.

"Why not? Look at me—I refused my husband no less than six times; and took him to get rid of him at last."

"Thank you; I'd rather not be taken just to be got rid of," said the Doctor, promptly.

Mrs. Leroy laughed. "Oh! that is sheer nonsense, I assure you; ask the Major, and see if he is not the happiest man in Jeypore."

"Perhaps so; but—well—no thank you."

Mrs. Leroy remained silent for a moment, thinking deeply.

"See here," she said, "I don't want Rachel to go back to England to relations she has never seen, who may make her anything but welcome, when by acting sensibly and reasonably she might be settled here in just as good a position as she has had all her life. And, what is more, I don't mean to let her do it, if I can prevent her being so foolish."

"But what can you do?"

"Talk to her. I can talk to her reasonably and calmly. You probably—for men are such blunderers—started the idea on her too suddenly, and frightened her to death, besides making her realise her loss more than she has ever done before."

"Well, I'm afraid I did," he admitted.

"I feel sure of it—you know when the whole main-spring of a woman's life is suddenly wrenched away from her she has to get used to the idea of replacing it. I am sure it would have been better to have waited till the very last, till she began to feel the pain of leaving all her friends and might have caught at any chance of remaining."

"But I don't want to be caught at like that; I want to be married for myself," he exclaimed.

Mrs. Leroy looked at him curiously, as she might have looked at some strange kind of spider or caterpillar. She had never realized before that Dr. Dealy had no conception of his own lankiness and the comical ugliness of his face. "Bless the man," she said to herself, "doesn't he *know* what a ridiculous creature he is? How odd it is that he is so particular about being married *for himself*, while a handsome fellow like my Major was only too thankful to be married to be got rid of. Oh, dear, dear! what a funny world it is."

Thus her thoughts ran; but, like a polite and sensible woman of the world, her spoken words conveyed a very different meaning.

"Yes, yes," she said, a little impatiently, "of course I quite understand all that—but my dear Dr. Dealy, you must make some little allowance for the state of the lady's mind and not accept as final an answer given when she was in trouble of the most trying kind."

The mention of Rachel's trouble tendered him at once. "What would you have me do, Mrs. Leroy?" he asked, meekly.

"Nothing. I will speak to her when I see a favourable opportunity—*only*,"—and here she paused and

looked at him sternly, so sternly that he shivered and felt himself a heartless villain on the spot—"it is no use my troubling myself—certainly paining her—perhaps raising a hope which otherwise she would dismiss from her mind as having been rendered impossible to her by her own unfettered actions, unless you back me up."

"Back you up," stammered the doctor, as she paused and looked at him solemnly. "I—I—don't think I know what you mean; I don't quite follow you."

"Well, unless you ask her again and put all that nonsense and pride about being married for yourself and all that straight out of your head, and at once. It is just this way with us women, Doctor; so long as the man who marries us is dejected and humble enough *before* he gets us, we rather like him to give himself airs about bullying us afterwards. Do you see?"

"No, I don't," said he, stoutly. "Do you mean to say that the Major bullies *you*?"

"Pretty well—pretty well," with a laugh. "As you must know, he very often positively forbids me to do things, and I always have to give in."

"Ah! things that you don't want to do," put in the disappointed lover, shrewdly. "I should like to see the Major try to forbid anything you had set your heart upon, Mrs. Leroy."

"Ah! not such a fool as he looks—upon my word, Rachel might do worse, and she would get used to his appearance in next to no time—Well," she said aloud, "then I am to speak to her?"

"If you please," he answered.

Thus prepared, Mrs. Leroy went by-and-by into her young visitor's room.

"May I come in, dear?" she asked, sweetly.

"Oh! yes," Rachel answered.

"I wanted to ask you," she began, then broke off short. "Why, my dear, you've been crying. What's the matter?"

Rachel's tears began to flow again instantly.

"I—I—oh! it's nothing."

"Nothing? Oh! don't tell me that, dearie; it must have been something to make you cry like this. What is it? Has Dr. Dealy——?"

"Yes, he has," Rachel flashed out, "and I hate him."

"But, my dear——" Mrs. Leroy began.

"It's no use your saying one word in his favour, Mrs. Leroy," Rachel cried, "he is unkind and inconsiderate, and—and if he wasn't, it wouldn't make any difference. I don't like him, and I never did like him, and I never shall like him, so there's an end of it."

"But, my dear——"

"Yes, I know—he is pretty well off, and he's *good*, and he's dreadfully fond of me, and it would be such an excellent thing for me, and after a bit I shouldn't even know that I'd had a father and lost him, and all the rest of it. But I don't like him, Mrs. Leroy, and I won't marry him, so there."

"Well, but, my dear——"

"Oh! I know—I know all you are going to say; if you can respect your husband, that's all that is necessary, and love will come. And you married your husband just to get rid of him. Ah! it's all very well, out your husband is one of the handsomest men in the Service—I daresay it was easy enough to you. If I had had a father as hideous as Dr. Dealy, I might get

used to it too. But I'm not going to try—It's no use your saying a word, Mrs. Leroy," she added, as that lady opened her mouth in an attempt to get a word in, "I'm not going to do it—not if there wasn't another man in all the world. I'd rather go out and scrub floors for a living—I'd rather starve than sell my soul for a home. I wouldn't marry him if he had millions and millions, and was a duke into the bargain"—and then she turned away and shut her lips tightly, as if wild horses should not drag another word out of her.

"And," said Mrs. Leroy to her Major half an hour later, "what more could I say?"





CHAPTER III.

GOING HOME.

"Be cheerful, and seek not external help, nor the tranquility which others give. A man must stand alone, not be kept erect by others."—MARCUS AURELIUS.

RACHEL POWER did not see her adorer again before she left Jeypore. It was through no fault of his; and Mrs. Leroy gave him all the help which lay in her power, by trying to persuade her obstinate young visitor at least to see him once more.

"I think you *ought* to do so, Rachel, dear," she urged; "because he was your father's friend, and he was very kind and attentive to him; and I think he would have wished you to be nice to him, even if you did not choose to marry him."

But Rachel was obdurate.

"Dear Mrs. Leroy," she said; "*you have been everything* that is good and kind and considerate to me in my time of trouble, and as long as I live I shall never, never be able to forget it—I shall never want to be able to forget it. But Dr. Dealy has been neither one nor the other, or he could never have dared to think about marriage at all before my poor darling was well taken away. And he was not a friend of my father's—never. Father always used to say—'Dealy's a good chap and all that and, by Jove, I respect him for it—yes, that I

do ; but all the same he's such an unmitigated ass I *can't* stand him, and that's the truth.' Now, Mrs. Leroy, would you like to marry a man that you had always heard called an unmitigated ass ever since you had known him ?”

“Perhaps not,” answered the older lady, unable to restrain a laugh ; “but I don't ask you to marry him, my dear, since you are so set against it ; I only think that it would be kind and polite to see him before you go, that is all.”

“Much better not,” returned Rachel. “If I did, he would be stupid enough to think I was inviting him to renew his offer, and I can't bear it, Mrs. Leroy, I cannot really. It's bad enough to lose all that made the world pleasant to you at one blow without having annoyances of this kind thrust upon you ; and I—I shall scream if he comes here—I'm quite sure I shall ; I shan't be able to help it.

“Then he shall not come,” said Mrs. Leroy, kindly.

She kept her word, and during the short time that Rachel remained in Jeypore she was not vexed by the presence of the man whom she had refused to marry : and, after all, it was but for a short time. Rachel was of age—was two and twenty, in fact ; and her father had left everything that he possessed to her absolutely and unconditionally, so that by the time his effects had been sold and his few debts paid, his affairs were practically in order and Rachel was free to do as she would and to go when and where she chose ; and, as a matter of course, she chose to carry out her father's last wish to the very letter, and to set out without loss of time to seek the protection of her grandfather, General Vandeleur.

To him she had written a few days after her father's death, while their house was yet untouched, explaining her position and her father's wish that she should seek his protection, and telling him that as soon as her affairs were settled she should go straight to him. "Indeed," she ended, "I shall most likely be on my way to England, where I have never been, by the time that you receive this."

To this she received no reply, nor, in fact, did she expect to do so. If General Vandeleur had received her letter, she fancied that it was just within the bounds of possibility that he might send her a cablegram to say she would be welcome; but when the day came for her to leave the shelter of Major Leroy's kind and hospitable roof and start for "home"—the old country which they all call home in India, even those who have never seen it—no such message had come, and she was almost sure that he had not yet received the news.

Poor girl, it was a terrible wrench when she found herself face to face with the parting from her old life; when one after another of those whom she had known in the happy and careless days which had gone by for ever, came and said "good-bye," wishing her luck and happiness in the new and strange life to which she was going. And then there was the last visit to the doctor's grave—the grave which she would probably never see or deck with flowers again; and it was here that she came nearest to breaking down altogether.

"I am going quite away, dear," she whispered to the burnt bare sods and the bright fresh flowers which she had just laid there—"but to do your bidding, just what you told me. I am going to do it to the very letter."

But at last this and all her other farewells were over. She had kissed Mrs. Leroy for the last time, and that kind woman had wept and sobbed over her as if it was a parting for ever; and then with streaming eyes and a choking throat she felt the train begin to move, and she was already on her way "home."

She was not alone—although Jeypore was a twenty hours' journey from Bombay, Major Leroy was taking her thus far on her journey that he might see her safe on board the steamer, and himself put her in the captain's special care. And this, too, was soon over, and she found herself with her escort on the snowy deck of the steamer.

"There, I think you will be all right now, my dear," said the Major, kindly—"there's nothing like being in the captain's care to ensure comfort, and Nellie has been home in this ship and out again. Ah! Harrington," he exclaimed, as a young man in the lightest and coolest of garments approached them, "is that you?"

The young man took off his hat. "Why, Major," he cried, "is that you?" Are you going home? Is Mrs. Leroy on board?"

"No such luck," answered the Major, with a laugh; "I only wish we were. No, I've come down to bring Miss Power and see her safely off. By-the-bye, let me introduce you to Miss Power. Mr. Harrington, of the Seashire Regiment."

Mr. Harrington took off his hat again, and Rachel bowed; the Major asked a question.

"Are you going home, Harrington?"

"Yes, Major, I am; and, thank heaven, I've done my last service in India."

"Really; are you leaving?"

"No; I'm exchanging to the White Horse."

"You don't say so? And with whom?" asked the Major, deeply interested in this bit of fresh news.

"With Jack Loftus," Harrington answered.

"Jack Loftus?—why—what does that mean?"

"Monte Carlo, I believe, Major; pity, isn't it?" Harrington replied carelessly. "However, it suits me down to the ground, for I had always a fancy for the White Horse, and I suppose it suits Loftus—his convenience, if not his fancy."

Then he turned to Rachel with a pleasant and winning manner, for which he was noted wherever he was known.

"So we are to be companions for the next fortnight, if not further! I suppose you leave the boat at Brindisi?"

"No; I am going to Southampton," she answered.

Her manner was as gracious and winning as his own, and her voice was so rich and musical that he looked at her with closer attention. Yes, she was wonderfully attractive, with her great dreamy eyes and her ruffled fairish hair, her soft pale skin, and her tall, slender, graceful figure! Yes; she was wonderfully attractive; had a *chic* air too—looked like a well-born woman, every inch of her, and—and Mr. Valentine Harrington felt, with a certain glow of self-satisfaction, that he should enjoy the voyage upon which he was about to start uncommonly well.

After a little while the time came for them to start, and there was a cry of "any more for the shore." Major Leroy took Rachel's hand, a trembling little hand, and bade her good-bye and God-speed.

"Good-bye, my dear. God bless you always," he said, huskily; "and remember that if ever you are not

comfortable, and you want to come back to India, or you want help of any kind, you have only to write to the wife, and we will do anything and everything that lies in our power."

The scalding tears rushed into Rachel's soft eyes, and her lips quivered.

"How good you are," she faltered.

"Nay, my dear, I hope you will never need help of any kind. Still, I mean every word I say, and I hope you believe it," he returned, hurriedly. "Good-bye, my dear, good-bye, God bless you,"—and then he pressed her two hands hard, looked at her doubtfully for a moment, then bent his head forward and made a faltering little dab at her cheek, as a little bird might make a timid little peck at a peach, and with another "God bless you," turned and fairly bolted.

For a moment Rachel Power was almost convulsed with the pain of parting from the last of her friends; then as the tears cleared away from her eyes, she encountered the intense amusement in Harrington's merry orbs; and laughter, like yawning, being infectious, I am bound to say the absurdity of the Major's farewell dawned upon her, and she went off straightway into a perfect agony of laughter, in which Mr. Harrington joined.

"'Pon my word, that was fine," remarked her new friend, when he had recovered himself enough to speak; and then he added in a very small voice, scarcely, indeed, above a whisper, "and, by Jove, I never knew what it was to envy old Leroy before."

Rachel, however, was busily waving her handkerchief as a final good-bye, and if she heard him, made not the smallest sign of it.



CHAPTER IV.

THE SEEDTIME OF PLEASURE.

"Do your duty honestly, because it is your duty, and it will then be given to you to perceive that the honest course is also the expedient one."—WHATELY.

RACHEL did not make many friends on board the *Saracen*. Being alone for the first time in her life, and in dire trouble, she made no effort to put herself on speaking terms with the other passengers. To all those who approached her she was gentle and graciously pleasant, but the advance never came from her.

The ship was very full, and on the whole she was left to her own devices. All the other passengers were strangers to her, and the fact of her deep mourning, so evidently new and for a very near relative, was sufficient to keep the majority of people at a distance, and besides that, she was so quiet and so sad that most of them felt instinctively that she would not care to join in their little dances, their round games, their merry-makings, and their frivolities.

She had her own chair in her own corner on deck, put there for her by the captain himself and taken from his own cabin ; and there she sat, hour after hour, stitching industriously at her embroidery work, wrapt

in her own thoughts of past and future days, and never troubling herself even to raise her head when some unusually gay burst of laughter floated towards her.

Generally Mr. Harrington was in the habit of planting his chair as near to hers as he could well get it, and often while she was working would read to her or talk to her, telling her in his smooth winning tones of his past life and adventures, of the hopes he had for the future, and, very often, of the delight and satisfaction he had in the present. No; I do not mean that he put the thought in those words—no, no—Valentine Harrington was too clever to call a spade a spade at any time; but he told her in general terms what a happy thing it was to be alive, and how, until he found himself on board of the *Saracen* on his homeward journey, he had never really realized the fact, never realized the full measure of joyousness and bliss that life held.

“If only,” he ended one day, when they were steaming down the Red Sea and nobody happened to be within hearing—“if only I weren’t a poor devil without two sixpences to rub together.”

“Well, you seem to get along very well with only one,” said Rachel, smiling, without looking up from a very distorted sun which she was patiently embroidering with flaming orange silks of different shades; at which Val Harrington gave a great sigh, and fell to trying to match her silks with one another, only to get them all into a hopeless tangle.

Rachel, after a moment or two, became aware of his occupation. “Stay, you need not spoil my silks because of those sixpences,” she said, and laid a white and slender hand upon him to stop him from making still further

havoc—"remember I cannot get any more till I reach England."

I could hardly tell why it was, but some strange and unusual thrill—strange and unusual to her, at least, though I fear an old enough sensation to him—must have passed from his hand to hers, for she looked up and their eyes met—met and gazed for a moment, when hers fell and she took up her work again and began embroidering quickly, and very badly, bending her head low down over the flaming sun that she might hide her blushes.

Val Harrington looked round—the deck was quite deserted, and he edged his chair a trifle nearer to hers.

"Rachel," he said in a whisper—a whisper which thrilled her through and through, and seemed to set her very heart on fire—"Rachel, dear, what is the matter?"

"Nothing," she said quickly, and worked harder at the flaming sun than ever.

He put his hand out gently, and quietly took her work away. "Rachel," he said, "what made you look at me like that?"

"I don't know," she answered in a troubled way.

"Shall I tell you?" he asked, dropping the embroidery on the deck and taking her hand in his.

Rachel said nothing, only tried to draw her hand away.

"Shall I tell you?" he repeated.

"If you like," she answered in a very low voice.

He edged a trifle nearer still, and took possession of the other hand also.

"Because you love me," he said.

She started at the words, and tried to draw her hands away. "Oh! no, no," she cried.

"Oh! yes, yes," he answered, "and why not? Why should you not love me when I love you? Tell me that?"

"But you ——" she began.

"I love you? Oh, Rachel, my darling, can you doubt it?"

"It is so soon," she murmured.

"Not at all. True, it is only a week—but in that week we have been together always, except just through the short hours of the hot nights. They have seemed endless to me and intolerable," he ended; "so I have stayed on deck as long as I could lure you to stop; and I have been up in the morning—well," with a smile, "you know how early I have been up, don't you?"

"You have been up early," she admitted. Somehow her new love was making her shy—she, who had been used to a society in which the masculine element outnumbered the feminine by some ten to one.

"Have we not seen more of each other in these few days, being here," waving his hand, "than we might have done in as many years in an ordinary garrison?" he asked, triumphantly. "Besides, love that is spontaneous is worth fifty thousand of the loves that are born of anything but love. Is that not so?"

"Perhaps; I don't know. I have never been in love in my life," she answered.

"Until now," he said, by way of correction.

"Until now," she repeated, with another swift shy glance, which made her altogether adorable to him.

"My love," he whispered; "my dear love." Then he glanced round again—yes, the coast was clear still, at least, though there might be others on deck there was nobody in sight, so he bent his handsome head and

kissed her hands.—“In token of my absolute submission,” he said, gallantly; “this, in token of my love,” he added, and kissed her on the lips. So for half an hour they remained in paradise—in Eden! Then the sound of voices roused them from their dream, and Rachel came to herself with a start.

“Let us tell nobody,” she said, hurriedly.

“As you like, my love,” he answered. The next moment a couple, who had been keeping all the ship alive and expectant by a violent flirtation, came gaily round the funnels and went to lean sentimentally over the side of the ship, not half a dozen yards away.

Rachel, with a look, rose and went quietly off to her cabin, leaving Val Harrington to put her work and silks together and stow them in the seat of her chair so as to be ready when she should come out again.

She wanted to be alone—she wanted to think; to think how strange and wonderful it all was, that she, who had been but so lately bankrupt of love, should all at once find herself so rich—so much richer than she had ever been before. How wonderful it was; and what a blessing that she should be able to go to her grandfather and say, “I only want you to be kind to me for a little time, until I am married.”

And then she began to wonder, with a new and fresh interest, what would her grandfather be like and what he would say to this handsome lover of hers, who, if he was not rich, was everything else that was most desirable in a husband—young, comely—comely, nay, beautiful—good, yes, she would swear that he was good, clever and brave—aye, a goodly list of recommendations for a man to have. Surely, when she came to him as the promised wife of such a man, he would not dis-

own her—oh! disown her, how could she think such a thing of a man whom she had never seen—perhaps he had pined and fretted after his daughter who had run away from him, and perhaps he was longing for an opportunity of forgiving the offence which had been given him four and twenty years ago.

And then all at once a new thought entered her mind—supposing that she told Val about her grandfather, he would probably know all about it, would know that he was rich and powerful; and then supposing that the old General would have nothing to say to her! Would not Val have reasonable cause to be disappointed? Yes! Then would it not be better for her to say nothing about the General; to say only that she was going to a near relation of her mother's—to profess herself exactly what she was, a poor and almost friendless girl, with not a thousand pounds in all the world that she could call her own? Then if the worst happened with regard to her grandfather, she would be neither better nor worse to him than she had ever been, and she would have at least positive proofs of the value of his love for her.

But, oh! what nonsense she was thinking; surely the sudden flood of joy after the dullness of her great sorrow had been too much for her. How could she have a suspicion in her mind about one who was so frank, so honest and good? Why, not an hour ago he had bent and kissed her hand: "This in token of my absolute submission"; and then he had kissed her on the lips: "In token of my love."

Aye, that was so; but Valentine Harrington had been very careful that there was no one by to see him!



CHAPTER V.

THROUGH THE STRAITS.

"In these things, place no confidence in a woman. She never brings to her tongue what is in her heart; she never speaks out what is on her tongue; and she never tells what she is doing."

ARABIAN NIGHTS.

WITH the burden of what almost amounted to a secret on her mind, Rachel was not so free in her intercourse with Valentine Harrington as she might otherwise have been, as indeed, probably, she would have been. She had, in a measure, to be very careful what she said—she constantly found herself leading up to the subject of the future, and from this she always edged away as quickly as she could, confining all her conversation as nearly as possible to the present, a proceeding which suited Mr. Valentine Harrington remarkably well—he being essentially one of those careless, happy-go-lucky men, who never do to-day what they can possibly put off till to-morrow; who live for to-day and to-day only, making time present as near an approach to Paradise as they can, and treating the time to come as a horrid nuisance to be put on one side until the march of the hours should force it upon their notice.

So it happened that these two young people left the

future altogether out of their discussions, and lived in the present, as only the young who are in love can live.

Once, however, Val Harrington came very near to the secret which lay like a lump upon Rachel's mind. They were sitting in their favourite place, just as they had sat on the day when he had first kissed her, she with her embroidery, and he with only the delight of watching her swift white hands as the needle went regularly in and out of her work, to occupy him; and suddenly he asked her a question which sent the quick red blood to her cheeks and made her heart beat hard and fast.

"Little mouse," he said, caressingly, "you know I am not going off the ship at Brindisi?"

"I did not know it," she said, trembling.

"Is it likely?" he returned, "here we are almost alone together; nobody seems to want to bother us in any way, or interfere with us, or even to talk scandal about us. Do you think I would miss all those long and lovely days together? God knows" he ended with a sigh, "when we may be so completely together again."

Rachel looked up quickly and opened her mouth as if to speak, then she checked the words that were actually on her lips and bent her head down again. Harrington went on speaking.

"Do you know, little one," he said, with another sigh and a complete change of tone, "that you have never told me a single word about these relatives of yours to whom you are going? Not even their name."

Rachel looked up again in infinite dismay. "I know," she said, meekly, "and—and—Val dear, would

you mind my not telling you anything until—until I have seen them?”

“Until you have seen them—why, my darling?” he exclaimed.

“I have never been in England,” she returned, “and if you will trust me, I would rather not say one word about them until I have seen them. I will tell you *every* thing the first time we meet in England, if you ask me. But to tell you now would only be to tell you a name. I have never seen them, and—and I might give you a wrong impression about them, and—and you will trust me, won’t you, dear?”

“Of course I will,” he cried, with a gay laugh. “What difference can the names of relations, whom you have never seen, make to me? I love you, my sweetheart, not your relations. Only I wondered what you would be doing and where you would be when I saw you again, that was all. I wonder where will you be?”

“I don’t know,” she answered dreamily. “I don’t know at all.”

“Then, how shall I find you again?”

“Give me your address, and I will write to you every day,” she answered.

“I will. I shall be in town. The Army and Navy Club will always find me.”

“I will write to you there,” she said, gravely.

After this they slipped back into their usual way of talking, dreamy discussions on all manner of subjects, anything or everything rather than the subject of their future life.

To Rachel, Valentine Harrington had told her as little of his affairs as she had told him of hers. Since the day when he had told her that he was a poor devil

without two sixpences to rub together he had never mentioned money to her in any way, and she was utterly ignorant of what his ideas of an income might be—of how much or how little money made a man a poor devil without two sixpences to rub together.

She was entirely ignorant too of his family, and as much so of his past as she was of his future; and though she was anxious, even eager to know everything there was to know about him, yet, whilst she herself was keeping a certain portion of the truth back from him, she could not reasonably expect him to be less reticent with her; and yet, Rachel did not think somehow that he had any intention of being reticent.

She puzzled herself a good many times about those two sixpences of his. Even to her, who had lived in the everyday luxury of Indian life, he seemed to be an unusually well-provided young man. For instance, he had silver cigarette cases, match-boxes—oh! yes, yes, I know that I am speaking in the plural—flasks, and all such things of unusual costliness. He had shot tigers in central India, had been up in Kashmir, and knew all the principal hill-stations well; he talked about his “tats” until Rachel was quite intimately acquainted with at least twenty of his “gees,” of one sort or other, and seemed, during his three years of Indian life, to have had a remarkably good time, and to have had almost unlimited means at his command.

And yet he was “a *poor* devil, without two sixpences to rub together.” Rachel could not make it out at all. However, one thing was certain—as certain, at least, as she could be on his word alone—which was that he was not in debt; for one day, when they were talking together on deck, he told her a great deal about a

certain friend of his, who, to use his language, "he's come a regular cropper, and would probably never be able to right himself again as long as he lived."

"But he was in debt, poor chap," said Valentine Harrington, in commiserating tones; "and after all, a poor chap how's in debt goes and does things in a sort of desperation that he'd never do in his sober senses; it's most of anything like being drunk is getting into debt—at least, so I'm told. I was never either myself, but that's what other fellows tell me."

So she felt sure that he was not in debt—but well, well, she was reticent with him and she must not expect him to be ready at first to tell her everything about himself. Besides, some men are like that, she argued; they would rather talk about anything than themselves, and although she felt sure that he would tell her everything about himself that there was to tell, were she to ask him, yet, likely enough, unless she did ask him he would never think of it at all.

Yes, she must wait; wait patiently until she had seen her grandfather, and arranged in some way what her life in the immediate future would be; then she would tell him everything—would say to him, "I kept my grandfather's name from you because he is rich and powerful, and if he disowned me you might have been disappointed. I have only been reticent because I want you to love me for myself, and myself alone"—and when Rachel Power reached this point she smiled tenderly to herself, for she knew but too well what his answer would be.



CHAPTER VI.

A MIXED PLEASURE.

"The good things of life are not to be had singly, but come to us with a mixture ; like a schoolboy's holiday, with a task affixed to the tail of it."—CHARLES LAMB.

THE *Saracen* was steaming up the Channel, and all aboard of her were in a state of wild excitement, and everyone was more or less exceedingly busy in packing up their belongings so that they might not have to stop one moment longer on the ship than they could help.

During the past week Rachel Power had been almost the only woman on board who had been able to appear on deck, for the weather had been exceptionally rough even for January, and most of the ladies and many of the men had been glad to keep the shelter of their cabins. But now that the worst was over, they had begun to come upon deck again, and to make little jokes with one another, and to congratulate themselves on being nearly home at last.

Not having been ill in crossing the bay, Rachel had been able to put her things together gradually, and therefore, as they drew near to the shores of the country which was her home though she had never seen it, she was able to spend all the hours of daylight on deck,

eagerly watching for every sight of the coast, and learning all manner of things from Valentine about the different places which they passed.

"Little mouse, you are cold," he said, commiseratingly, when they had been standing for an hour or more watching the land in the distance.

"Yes; I am very cold, Val. Is it *always* so cold as this?" she asked, piteously.

"Well, at this time of year it pretty nearly always is," he admitted. "I must buy you a seal's-skin coat as soon as I can take you out in Town; you will need it after being in India all your life. Don't you think you had better come down now?"

"No, not yet; I shall be just as cold down there," she replied.

"Then slip my ulster on over your coat," he urged, for he was uneasy about her; and as she made a movement of assent, continued: "of course, you know, darling, it won't be quite like this ~~on~~ shore; I mean it is always piercingly cold on the water, and besides that, on shore you have the protection of the hills or the houses. Yet it is cold everywhere in England compared with what you've been used to."

"Yes; I suppose so," she said, shrinking cosily into the big coat as if she were only too glad of the extra protection.

For a few minutes they were silent. "Let us go and sit down," said Val; "you must be tired of standing so long."

She looked a little unwilling, but he urged her still further; "Do, darling; we have been so happy in our own little corner these few weeks; let us have another hour together—do!"

Thus coaxed, Rachel left the side of the ship and sat down in her chair, with a mist before her eyes and a great lump in her throat which would not be swallowed, try as she might.

"Let me tuck the fur well round you," he said, taking up the great bear-skin rug in which he had wrapped her each day since she began to feel the cold. "Why, my darling, you're crying," he exclaimed; "why, my love, is it so hard to part, even for a little while? Oh! my dear, my dear, don't fret like this; we shall be together again almost before we know that we have been apart from one another."

"I don't know," whispered she, half-sobbing, "I have a horrible feeling somehow that we shall never be together again."

Valentine Harrington fairly laughed aloud. "Oh, my dearest, what nonsense; I, too, have a presentiment, but it is that we shall be together again in a very short time, and that we shall be all the world to one another for ever."

Rachel made a great effort and choked down her tears and the inconvenient something in her throat which was such a trouble to her just then, and forced herself to smile and talk to him of the good time they would have when they met in London.

"I daresay," he wound up after a long description, "you won't think much of it at first; likely enough you'll think it ugly, hideous even—a good many people do, just to begin with—but after a time, when you get to know the lines of the place, you'll think as I do, that there isn't such a spot for having a real good time in all the great wide world."

"Do you really think so?" she asked. "Ah, that was just what my father always used to say to me."

"I am sure of it. I must take you sight-seeing at once."

"Yes. I want to see the Tower and Westminster Abbey—you'll take me to those, won't you?"

Valentine looked a little doubtful. "Oh—ah—well, yes, I suppose so, if you have set your mind on it. Only, frankly, my darling, I never heard of anyone going to either of those places except on a matter of business, you know. I have been to the Tower. I went down to see a fellow who was quartered there once—uncommonly good time of it he seemed to have too; but I didn't go into the show."

"The show!" cried Rachel, opening her soft eyes widely.

"Yes—the—the—well, really, dearest, I don't know what they do inside there; but there is some kind of a show there; I'm sure of that."

"And you never went—you never saw Tower Hill and the place where Lady Jane Grey was beheaded, and the tower where the little princes were murdered? You never saw that?"

"Never," he answered, promptly.

"And you have never been to Westminster Abbey?"

"Well, I have been there. I once went to a funeral there; but I've never been round as a show, never."

"But I shall want to go there first of any place I go to," she cried, enthusiastically.

"So you shall. We will go on long pilgrimages all over everywhere, and your soul shall be satisfied. Don't think me a Goth, my darling—it isn't because I don't take an interest in these places, but the fact is, I

know a good many people in London, and I've never lived there, you see; so when I've had a few days or a few weeks' leave, I have always had more engagements than I could get through."

"And now?" cried Rachel, wondering how his engagements would let him find time to take her everywhere.

"I never knew anyone before who attracted me enough to make engagements of no importance," he said, tenderly, at which Rachel turned upon him with an ineffable smile of absolute contentment and trust.

"That is the sweetest thing you have ever said to me, Val," she said, softly.

For a little time they were perfectly quiet and happy. The deck was deserted, and around them the shades of evening were fast creeping. Then suddenly Rachel asked a question—almost the first direct one which she had ever put to him.

"Then your father and mother don't live in London?" she said, speaking out just what was in her mind.

"My father and mother are both dead, dear," he said quietly. "I always stay with my godfather when I am in town."

"Oh! I see—and your godfather——?"

"My godfather is a very charming old gentleman," said Val gaily. "And when you see him I am sure you will say so; but, at present, my darling, it is far too cold to stay here discussing him or anyone else. Pray let us go down, or we shall be petrified, which would be a pleasant thing for you. Come!"

He rose as he spoke, and Rachel, who, in spite of her brave words, was shivering, rose too; in truth, not sorry to be given a good excuse for going below.

So that last day came to an end, and a few hours later they were alongside of the quay at Southampton, and had come to their journey's end. Well, no, not quite that, but the *Saracen* had come to the end of her journey, and her passengers had, many of them, not much farther to go to be at the end of theirs.

Rachel was a little bewildered by the bustle of landing, although Valentine took as much of the trouble off her shoulders as he could. And at last they got fairly away from Southampton, and were gliding towards the big city in which he had promised she should have a real good time.

"Little mouse," he said, when they had passed Aldershot, and she had peered out into the darkness to try and see what kind of place it was and succeeded very badly, "I shall have to take you to Madame Tussaud's one day."

"I should like to see that—what made you think of it? Have you ever been there?"

"Oh, yes! it's great fun, and it's easy to get at too. What made me think of it? Well, I was just going over the places you would be likely to care about. I must take you to see the pictures—there are heaps of picture galleries in Bond Street—you'd like to see those, wouldn't you? Do you care for pictures at all?"

For a moment Rachel Power fairly gasped for breath. Would she like to go to the picture galleries? Did she care about pictures? Why, could it be possible that she had never told him that she had been in Rome, and had studied art there for more than two years? It seemed incredible; and yet, evidently, he had no knowledge of that other life of hers, which was devoted to art; of that other self, which lived and breathed only for art!

It was incredible ; but in the twinkling of an eye she remembered that she had given all her time to needle-work during the voyage ; that she had talked singularly little, being full of sad thoughts to begin with, and then being as fully occupied afterwards in listening to the ever new and delightful conversation which flowed, almost without ceasing, from his lips.

“ Yes, I should like to see all the picture-galleries,” she said, with difficulty repressing a smile and thinking how she would keep the secret until they met in London, and then she would show him her medals of distinction and the letters full of praise which she had received while in the Holy City—the cradle of Art.

“ I suppose your people will come to meet you ? ” he remarked after a while.

“ I don’t know—it is possible ; but I don’t fancy they will. You see, I only said in my letter that it was probable I should come by the *Saracen*, and indeed, I think it is very likely they will not think of it. But I will go to Morley’s Hotel, please—that was where my father told me to go if I came home by myself. By myself—oh ! ” laying her hand on his and looking up at him with her great soft eyes filled with tenderness and gratitude, “ how glad he would have been if he had known about you—he so wanted to know that I should be safe and happy, and see how soon I am both.”

Valentine put his arm round her and drew her close to him.

“ And you are happy, are you not, my love ? ” he asked. “ You do love me ? ”

“ Yes, I love you,” she answered.

—“ You are *quite* sure ? ”

“ I am quite sure,” she said, steadily.

He held her closer still.

"If ever I asked you to do something for me, to make a sacrifice for me, I wonder if you would do it?"

"I think I should," smiling at him.

"You only think," reproachfully.

"I am as certain as I can be of anything, that I should do it," she answered.

"That is good. Perhaps some day I shall come to you and try you."

"You mean you will ask me to give you up freely and willingly?" she said.

Valentine Harrington burst out laughing.

"Good heavens, child, nothing was further from my thoughts!" he cried. "What could have put such a preposterous notion into your head?"

"I don't know," she said timidly, and with a sigh of satisfaction rested her head against him and said no more.

And by-and-bye they ran into Waterloo Station—to my mind, the most confusing of all the stations in London—to Rachel Power's, the nearest approach to Pandemonium which she had ever seen.

"Now, do you see any of your people?" Valentine asked her, briskly, while she was staring vaguely about wondering if London was all shouting and pushing and jostling like this. To Valentine it was like coming back to life again and beginning to live—to her it was like a large draught of brandy to one used to drinking water.

"My people? I don't know them. I shouldn't know them if they were right under my nose," she answered, trying to shake the feeling of confusion off her. "Besides, I can't go to anybody's house at this

time of night, and I know I look horrid. Let me go straight to Morley's and get to bed, and then in the morning I can go to my—my people looking clean and respectable."

"All right," he said. "Shall I go with you?"

"No; go to the carriage with me, that is all," she answered.

"Still, I think I'd better go. I'll follow you, and see you get rooms and all that."

This, eventually, was what he did; and in less than half an hour Rachel felt the cab pull up with a jerk at the door of a large building, painted white or drab, and Valentine was at the door of the cab, saying that he would find out if they could take her in or not.

Certainly they could accommodate the lady, they told him; so Valentine fetched her from the cab and told her to be sure to get some food before she went to bed.

"I shall come round in the morning," he said, as he took her hand.

"No, not in the morning; I shall be out," she answered. "Come about five o'clock."

About five—very well. Take care of yourself till then, my dearest," he said tenderly. Then he went out into the darkness; and Rachel heard him shut the door of his cab, and the cab roll away.

"I should like to have some supper sent up to me," she said to the maid who had been sent for to show her to her room.

"Certainly, madam; you will not mind a little cold chicken, perhaps? It is too late to have anything cooked; but I could make you some tea, madam, if you would prefer that."

"I would rather have that than *any* thing," cried poor Rachel, who all at once had begun to feel desolate.

"You shall have it in two or three minutes, miss," said the chambermaid, growing quite friendly. "I daresay you've had rather a long journey, miss. You are tired and hungry."

"Yes; I have had rather a long journey," said Rachel. "I have come from India."

"You shall have your tea in five minutes, miss," said the woman, with a gesture as if Rachel had come all the way from India without so much as even tasting a single cup of tea on the way. Rachel sat down before the newly-lighted fire in the large bedroom, feeling very lonely and inexpressibly dreary. They were very kind, and at that hour of night she felt that she could not expect to have more comfort and attention, coming without warning as she had done. But the room was so large, and the two lighted candles on the dressing-table gave such an insufficient light, and the fire was sulky and did not seem inclined to burn. Besides that, she was cold and hungry, and felt as if she had not energy enough to begin unpacking the big box which was the only part of her luggage which she had asked to have sent up. Oh! it was dreadful to her to be alone in London. She could only thank God that she was not alone in the world.





CHAPTER VII.

ALONE IN LONDON.

“It is a mistake to suppose that men succeed through success : they much oftener succeed through failure.”—SMILES.

ALTHOUGH Rachel had not been many hours in bed, she was up betimes in the morning, and certainly when she went down into the coffee-room to take her breakfast, and was given a comfortable table near the fire and quite close to a window which looked up the busy Strand, she looked as fair and winsome a damsel as ever came home to be the joy and delight of an offended grandfather's heart.

In fact, many an admiring glance was cast at the graceful black-robed figure as she passed along the room, and many more were cast at the beautiful fair face as she bent over the paper or let her eyes wander towards the thronged and busy street, the like of which she had never seen before.

Rachel, on the contrary, did not pay much attention to the people in the room. She was accustomed to that kind of admiration, and just then her thoughts were occupied with the ordeal which lay before her—the meeting with the grandfather whom she had never seen, the old General who might or might not accept her as his granddaughter.

Presently the head-waiter came to see if there was anything else that he could get for her.

"Nothing else," she said; "but can you tell me how far Portland Place is from here?"

"Oh, yes, madam; it is not more than a mile or so," he replied.

"How can I best get there?" she asked.

"In a hansom, madam; we can call one for you at any moment," he said.

"Thank you," said Rachel, and looking at her watch, saw that it was nearly ten o'clock.

"Had I better go now?" she said to herself. "No, it is too early; Father always said everything was later here. I will wait for an hour at least."

Eventually, just at half-past eleven o'clock, she came down from her room, dressed for walking, and asked them to get her a cab. "Do I pass any shops on the way?" she asked of the porter.

"Certainly, madam; some of the best shops in London," he answered. "What kind of shops do you require?"

"A fur shop."

"You pass several, madam;" he said, and went down the steps before her, guarding her gown from the wheel as she got into the cab—then added to the cabman, "To 200 Portland Place, and stop at a good furrier's in Regent Street on the way."

In an incredibly short time Rachel found herself at the door of Williams's, in Regent Street, and there she got out, fairly shuddering in her cloth-coat.

"I have just come from India," she said to the pleasant woman who came forward to wait upon her,

“and I find the cold terrible. I see that ladies are wearing large capes. Will you show me some?”

“Certainly,” said the pleasant woman, promptly—and forthwith a great bundle of fur capes of various kinds was placed upon the counter, and she was invited to look at them. “You would not like to have a seal-skin coat, madam?” asked the pleasant woman.

“No, not a sealskin,” returned Rachel, quickly.

“They are more expensive than these, of course,” she said, “but we have some at remarkably low prices just now.”

“No, not a sealskin,” Rachel answered, “the fact is,” she said, suddenly feeling friendly towards the pleasant face and voice, “the fact is, I have promised that the gentleman I am going to marry shall buy me one, but it won’t be for a few days, and I feel if I don’t have something to put between me and this piercing cold, I shall not be alive to wear it when it is bought.”

“I see, madam,” smiling, and thinking that the gentleman who was going to marry so sweet and fair a girl had done an uncommonly good thing for himself in winning her, “then I should recommend you to have one of these large bear capes and a muff to match it—they are very warm and are really endless wear, and being a natural skin, that is undyed, there is no colour to come off as is the case with many other kinds of fur.”

In the end, Rachel went away with a cape and muff, which made her feel and look like a different being altogether; and the dark heavy fur suited her too, and made her fair face look fairer than it had done before.

“It suits you perfectly, madam,” said the pleasant woman, with a gesture towards the glass.

“I think it does,” said Rachel, turning herself round.

"I hope the gentleman will give us the order for the sealskin coat, madam," she continued.

"I'll tell him to come here," said Rachel, and then she went out to the cab and got in, feeling that she need not much mind the cold now.

"To Portland Place, now," she said.

She was there in a few minutes—the broad handsome street impressed her and she began to feel awed. However, she got out of the cab and paid the man, and then she went up the steps of No. 200 with all her heart in her mouth.

She pulled the handle of the bell which was marked "visitors," but there was no answer to the summons. She waited a good bit and wondered if the bell had rang. She thought she would try again, and did—and waited again, and all this time the heart in her mouth got bigger and bigger until it was like to burst. Then just as she was beginning to think that she would have to make a third attempt, the door was opened abruptly and flung back wide, and she found herself confronted by an awful personage in pepper-and-salt clothes and a black coat, who stood awaiting her pleasure.

"Is General Vandeleur at home?" she asked, shrinking behind her furs and feeling very weak and shaky about the knees, and very much more inclined to cry than anything else.

"General Vandeleur is out riding, ma'am," he answered, very much as if she ought to have known of it and not have come there bothering him for nothing.

"Oh, really!" Rachel fairly gasped out the two words, the relief of not seeing him was so great. "What time will he be in, do you think?"

She thought afterwards that if she looked half as frightened as she felt, her looks must have accounted for her grandfather's pompous butler suddenly unbending. He let go his hold upon the door and came a step forward.

"Well, ma'am," he said, quite kindly, "the General always rides in the morning and lunches at home afterwards; and then he goes out about four and stays at his club till near dinner-time."

"Then if I came about three o'clock?" Rachel began.

"I think you would be sure to find him, ma'am," said the butler, affably.

"I will come at three then," said she, turning away.

"Stay, I will leave a card."

"Yes, ma'am," returned the servant.

"And you will be sure to tell General Vandeleur that I came, and that I will return then?"

"Certainly, ma'am," was the reply.

So Rachel turned away from her grandfather's house a little dulled but not disheartened. Of course she could not expect that after he had got her letter he should at once sit down and say, "I will not leave the house, lest I should be out when she comes." No; and yet, she felt that she would have been very very glad if he had happened to be at home to receive her.

If she had looked back she would have seen that the portly butler was standing on the outer step holding her card in his hand and looking after her. That she did not do, however, but walked quietly back towards Regent Street. But General Vandeleur's butler stood and stared with all his eyes after the tall retreating figure, and at last turned back into the house, examining the card as he went.

"H'm—it's queer," he remarked to himself, in a puzzled kind of way. "'Miss Rachel Power,' and 'Morley's Hotel' written in pencil underneath—Morley's Hotel—and Miss Rachel Power. It's queer, to say the least of it, for she's as like the General as two peas."

Very few minutes afterwards the General returned from his ride; indeed, if she had but known it, Rachel passed him in Regent Street. It was then getting near lunch-time, which meal he always ate at one o'clock to the very minute. He went into the library and sat down at the table, drawing some paper before him as if to write a letter. The butler followed him and stood in an attitude of respectful attention calculated to attract his notice.

"Well, Jones, what is it?" he asked, looking up.

"A lady called this morning, sir," said Jones, laying the card on the table beside him.

The general took up the card and glanced at the name, then put it down as if it had bitterly offended him.

"Very well," he said curtly, and took up his pen.

Jones coughed deferentially—"I beg your pardon, sir, but the lady seemed very much disappointed that you were out, sir."

"Oh!" the old man uttered the word in a perfectly wooden tone, without in any way satisfying the servant's natural curiosity.

Jones coughed again when he found that his master was not going to say anything else.

"And she particularly wished me to say, sir, that she should call again about three o'clock this afternoon."

"Oh!—very well!—That will do, Jones."

Again there was no significance in the old General's tones, only an unmoved expression of comprehension of the information which had just been given to him, in the face of which the butler had no choice but to leave the room.

In about a quarter-of-an-hour he returned to inform his master that lunch was ready, and being still extremely curious about the young lady who bore so strong a resemblance to him, cast a searching glance at the table to see if the card was still there. Yes, it was there, and moreover precisely in the same place where the General had laid it down after looking at it; apparently he had not moved it or even looked at it again.

"Luncheon is served, sir," said Jones.

"I will come," said the General, rising. "Let this letter be sent to post at once."

As soon as his master had been served, the butler went out into the hall and summoned one of the young footmen, taking the opportunity of reading the address on the letter—"Sir Reginald Dallow, United Service Club." "Oh! James, take this to post and look sharp about it," he said, authoritatively, to the underling who answered his summons.

And then he went into the dining-room with his own deferential manner in full play, satisfied that Sir Reginald Dallow had nothing to do with the young lady who was staying at Morley's Hotel, and who was coming again at three o'clock.

General Vandeleur sat over his lunch for nearly an hour, winding up with a tiny glass of Benedictine and a cigarette, which he spun out to the furthest limits of enjoyment. Then, after glancing over some of the new

weekly papers, he composed himself for a ten minutes' nap, more than which he had never allowed himself in his life. This in time was broken by the entrance of Jones.

"The carriage is at the door, sir."

General Vandeleur shook himself together.

"Very well."

"Shall I tell Parker to wait, sir?"

"To wait? No; I shall be ready in a few minutes."

Jones coughed. "Beg pardon, sir—but the lady who called this morning said she would call again about three o'clock."

General Vandeleur grew woodenly haughty at once.

"Very well, I suppose you know what to say?"

"That you are not at home, sir?" said the butler, in a surprised tone.

"Damnation, sir," thundered the General, for the first time speaking with any expression, "if I've got to teach you your business after all these years, you'd better go elsewhere and learn it. I suppose when I'm not in the house you generally say I'm not at home, don't you?"

"Certainly, sir," returned the servant, with quite a little volley of coughs, deprecating and otherwise.

"Then what else is there to be said to-day? 'Pon my soul, you seem to me to get more stupid and ignorant every day you live."

There is one blessing which domestic service brings with it—that is the power of being able to bear other people's temper with equanimity, and the certainty of learning that it is best to take what masters and mistresses say in a boiling passion for what it is worth. Many persons might have been distinctly offended by such plain-spoken remarks, but Jones was wise in his

day and generation, and did not even permit himself to be momentarily ruffled.

"H'm—it's very queer," he said to himself when the old General, with his fiercely-waxed white moustache, his close-cropped white hair, looking quite an old beau in his sable-trimmed coat, had driven away towards the circus in his smart mail-phæton. "It's queer, to say the least of it."

But I must do Jones the justice to say, that unruffled as he was by the General's hard words to himself, he did not half like the task of answering the door when Rachel Power knocked at it at a few minutes past three o'clock.

"I am sorry to say, ma'am," he said, with an apologetic cough, "that General Vandeleur is not at home."

"But he has been in?" she asked.

"He has, ma'am."

"And you gave him my card?"

"I did, ma'am—and your message."

"My message?"

"That you would call again at three o'clock, ma'am," he exclaimed.

"And he said——?"

"General Vandeleur did not say anything, ma'am."

"But he is out?"

"Yes, ma'am, he is; he went out driving about twenty minutes ago."

"And you are sure that he left no message for me?"

"Quite sure, ma'am; in fact"—and here Jones became afflicted by quite a little volley of coughs, apologetic and explanatory—"in fact, ma'am, I ventured to remind the General, as he was going out, that you would return at three o'clock; but he left no message, ma'am."

For a moment, although she had all along been fully prepared for this contingency, Rachel was almost too stunned by the repulse to speak. It is not a pleasant thing to run your head against a stone wall, and while you are still smarting with the pain, remember that you ought to have known better, and to have been quite sure that you could not help hurting yourself. However, she shook off the feeling of pain and soreness by an immense effort, and looked back frankly and straight into the sympathetic but distinctly inquisitive eyes of the old servant.

“Oh! thank you; it does not matter,” she said, quietly. “I daresay General Vandeleur has gone to my hotel or written to me. I thank you—Good day.”

She turned quickly away, and went towards the Langham, feeling as she had never known what it was to feel in all her life before. If she could only have got away somewhere to hide herself—somewhere where she would be able to cool her burning cheeks! But no; she was in Portland Place in the full glare of a bright January afternoon, and she could only walk on with knees that trembled under her, with hands that were trembling too, and clammy cold within her bear-skin muff, with a mist before her eyes, and a strange singing noise in her ears—walk on and try to realise that she had come from the other side of the world, friendless and alone, to seek the protection of her own grandfather, and that she had been rejected—aye, worse than that, that her rejection had come to her through a servant; and the very servant had pitied her—had felt for her in the hour of her humiliation—she had seen it plainly in his eyes!



CHAPTER VIII.

REJECTED.

"Remember that the reverse of wrong is not always right."—
WHATELY.

"Come what may, hold fast to love. Though men should rend your heart, let them not embitter or harden it."—ROBERTSON.

WHERE Rachel Power would have gone or what would have become of her if she had kept on her own feet, I do not know, for she was so taken up with her own affairs as to be quite incapable of thinking of such ordinary and everyday matters as crossing roads with safety, or of knowing where she was going. Happily, however, a crawling cabman, on the look-out for a fare, happened to attract her attention, and this somewhat brought her to herself.

"I might go for a drive until time to go back," she thought. "I must not let Val see how this has hurt me";—then aloud she said to the cabman: "I want to go for a drive for an hour or so. Can you take me?"

"Yes, lady," he answered.

"What will you charge?"

"I'll leave it to you, lady," he answered.

"But I don't know what the charge ought to be," she cried, with the utmost perplexity.

"Well, lady, where do you want to go?" he asked.

"Anywhere—I don't mind. Down some of the best streets or—or—I don't care where, as long as you take me back to Morley's Hotel, in Trafalgar Square, by half-past four."

"Very good, lady; its 'alf-past three now. If I drive you along Oxford Street, and through the Park, and along Piccadilly to Morley's—charge?—Well," looking at her doubtfully, "four-and-sixpence."

"That will do," said Rachel, and got into the cab.

She tried her best to enjoy herself—it was all so new, so strange. She had talked so often with her father about the mother-country, which she had never seen—of going "home,"—and here she was in the very street which he had described to her so often—yet alone.

Yet though she could not take much interest in the gay shops and the busy crowds of men and women sauntering or hurrying along, still she did not find her thoughts go back into exactly the same groove that they were in as she walked, like a woman in a dream, down Portland Place.

She was vexed, of course, and hurt—more than hurt, she was cut to the heart; but after all, her grandfather was not essential to her existence. Probably without her father's last wishes to guide her, she would never have given him a thought, or have put herself to the trouble of going near him. It was hard, of course, to have been snubbed like that, to have had her face openly slapped so to speak; but all the same, the blame of that did not rest upon her, but upon him. It was humiliating, most humiliating, and hard upon her, for she had never known the bitterness of a genuine snub in all her life before, yet, after all, though the pain of it had entered her soul like iron for a short time, the rudeness

and the ill-breeding of it had no effect on her, rather they were a justification in her mind of the story of her mother's past life.

"I will put him altogether out of my head," she said to herself. "I won't even think about him again. After all, what loss can a man be to me that I have never even seen—and a disagreeable rude old man into the bargain, as he must be. No; I have Val, and while I have my Val, I need think twice of no annoyance and worry myself about nothing."

With this resolve in her mind she set herself to look with interest at shops and people, then at the green beauty of the park through which they went. But very soon her thoughts went back to Valentine Harrington, and she fell into a day-dream about him, which lasted till, with a start, she found herself turning into Trafalgar Square.

"And it is half-past four," she said. "He will be here very soon now. I must be quick, and make myself look pretty before he comes."

She had plenty of time. Until nearly six o'clock there was no sign of him, then he came with a dozen apologies for being so late. He had been detained on a matter of importance—had not been able to get away; was, in fact, fussed and hurried, and apparently a little put out.

"The worst of these places is that there is nowhere where one can talk in comfort," he exclaimed, glancing at the door with a disgusted air. "However, tell me, my darling, how did you get on this morning? Did you go to see your relations?"

"Yes," said Rachel, in a very low voice. "I went."

"Yes—and—and they——."

"They would not even see me," she said, in a tone of great pain.

"Wouldn't even see you. Is it possible? Are you sure, little mouse?"

"Quite sure. I went twice."

"The old cat," muttered he, indignantly.

"I promised," she said, with an effort, "to tell you everything to-day. My mother ran away with my father, and——"

"My dear child, don't distress yourself by telling me," he said, tenderly. "It is perfectly useless to worry yourself, even by remembering that the old cats are in existence. I don't want to know anything about them, not even their names. I am sure your mother was quite right to run away from people who could treat my darling in that way."

Rachel gave a great sigh of unutterable contentment. It was so good to her to hear her lover speak out in this brave, bold fashion, and let her think of her grandfather with the contempt that he deserved. It was so good to feel that whatever might happen she would always be safe and well-cared for in the shelter of his strong arms. There was such a triumph in the feeling, that, after all, her grandfather had not scored by treating her with unfeeling rudeness. And oh! how happy she was.

"I think I ought to tell you why I have said so little," she began, presently—but Val interrupted her laughingly. "My sweetheart," he said, "you shall tell me nothing until I ask you, because this is our first day in England together, and I am not going to have you vex yourself by discussing unpleasant subjects and detestable people. Let us go out and have a real good

time. Go and put on an evening gown, and something warm to wrap round you, and to-morrow you must remind me to buy you that coat, and a warm wrap for evenings, and I will rush off and get dressed too; and then I will take you to dine somewhere, and we will do a theatre afterwards. Then to-morrow we can have a great and serious discussion as to what will be the best for you to do until—Oh! d—m,” he broke off in a sharp whisper as the handle of the door was turned.

Rachel could not help laughing outright.

“I will go and dress at once,” she said, rising at once; “how long have I? Half-an-hour?”

“Yes; rather more than less,” he answered. “I shall not lose a moment.”

He opened the door for her, and she went out of the room, and as she went she passed in front of two men who were on the point of coming in. They turned and watched her go up the stairs, then looked round at the man who had opened the door.

“Why, Harrington, old chap, how are you?” exclaimed one of them. “Is it really you? When did you come back?”

“Ah! Parkes, how are you?” returned Harrington, who was furious at the encounter. “I got back yesterday, or rather early this morning.”

“And paying calls already, eh! you sly dog,” said Parkes, with a familiar dig in the ribs. “Who is the lady, eh?”

“Not anyone you know,” returned Val, curtly. “I’m awfully sorry, but I must be going. I’ve got a dinner engagement and must be off to dress.”

“All right, old fellow. Still at the same address, I suppose?”

"Yes ; but come and look me up at the club—yes, the same. Will you breakfast with me to-morrow, both of you?"

"Be delighted. What time?"

"Ten ; if that's not too early."

"Not at all—be delighted. Good-bye, old chap."

"Now I wonder," said Parkes to the other man, when the door had closed behind Harrington. "I wonder what the devil that fellow is up to?"

"What should he be up to?" asked the other.

"When you know old Val better," said Parkes, with a laugh, "you'll always know what that particular manner means—a woman."

"Well, of course, there was a woman, and an uncommonly pretty one, too," said De Guise.

"Yes ; but I happen to know that manner. Here's a waiter. I say, waiter, who is the tall young lady in mourning, who is stopping here?"

"I don' know, sare. I will enquire," replied the waiter, civilly.

He returned in a few minutes.

"She is a Miss Power, sare ; she arrive from India this morning."

"Oh ! thank you, thank you." Then as the waiter went out, "Didn't I tell you so? Ah ! I know old Val well—no one better."

His friend laughed out aloud. "Well, old chap, you certainly said the lady was a woman, and that Harrington knew her. All the same though, I don't know that you conveyed much information to me, considering that I could see that for myself without much difficulty."

"Yes ; but there's something between 'em," Parkes persisted.

"I shouldn't wonder," returned the other, "if they came home in the same ship it's not unlikely. Harrington would never be such an ass as to lose such a chance as that."

"Harrington don't lose much chance when a woman is concerned," Parkes said, gloomily.

"And small blame to him," remarked De Guise, who had a fellow-feeling for the hero of the situation. "I only wish there was a ghost of a chance in the same quarter for me. By Jove, I'd give old Val an uneasy time of it if there was."





CHAPTER IX.

WITH OPEN EYES.

“A man’s nature ranneth either to herbs or weeds.”—BACON.

“There are words which sever hearts more than sharp swords ; there are words, the point of which sting the heart through the course of a whole life.”—BREWER.

“I CANNOT come to you until four o’clock or so, to-morrow, my dearest,” had been Valentine Harrington’s last words when he had taken her back to the hotel after the theatre ; and now it was nearly five, and still he had not come.

Rachel, though she was well amused by the novelty of watching the tide of humanity as it flowed past the window, was beginning to get a little impatient, and to wonder what was keeping him so long.

Like most new-comers to the city of great distances, she made no excuse for the difficulties of making time and place fit in with one another, and she, not unnaturally, thought that however he might inconvenience others, her lover ought to keep his promise to her.

Although she had been alone she had not had a dull day, for immediately after breakfast she had gone across into the National Gallery, and there she had remained until past two o’clock. Then she had lunched, and in

delightful ignorance of any difference between one street and another, had taken a walk down the Strand for the purpose of looking into the very attractive shop windows.

From this expedition, I am sorry to say Rachel Power came back to the safe shelter of the hotel in a towering passion. Poor child! She had not got very far down the Strand either, and had not had more than a peep at any of the shop-windows, for no sooner did she stop to look at a particularly charming display of rings in a jeweller's shop, than a rather florid gentleman stopped too, and asked her if he might have the pleasure of buying her some of the pretty things she was admiring.

Now Rachel had always heard that the streets of London were paved with gold; but she had never expected to have a practical illustration of the saying like this. As a matter of fact, when the smooth bold voice addressed her, she gave a great start and sprang half a yard away from the window.

"*Sir!*" she cried.

"No; don't start like that, my pretty one," her admirer said, soothingly.

With great dignity Rachel drew herself up to her full height. "Sir," she said, in freezing accents, "you mistake me."

Her statement was so evidently sincere that the smooth-voiced gentleman made no attempt to help her further to realise the truth of an old saying; on the contrary, he took off his hat and begged her pardon; and Rachel, with a stiff bow, walked on, feeling perfectly safe, being sure that she could not meet with two such men in one street.

Poor child ! A pretty girl does not walk very far down the Strand on a winter's afternoon without a good deal of attention of that kind ; and the result of Rachel's rash pilgrimage was that she had at last to jump into a cab, as the best and easiest way of getting out of her difficulties.

And what a passion she was in ! Positively she had trembled like a leaf when she got back to the hotel, so that she could scarcely manage to get up the steps to the door. Nay, she was even trembling a little still, nearly two hours afterwards.

But oh ! these dreadful London streets. They were amusing enough to watch through a window or from the safe shelter of a cab ; but for a woman alone, and on foot, they seemed to be impossible ; and yet her common-sense told her that there must be hundreds and hundreds of women in this great city who did not possess carriages and could not afford cabs, who had husbands all day long absorbed by the cares of business, or who did not possess husbands at all. Surely these women must go out daily, and alone ! Why, yes, she herself had seen a great many women of all ages and classes go past that very window, and yet they seemed to be allowed to go along quietly and without molestation--without the hideous kind of attention which had been so freely lavished upon her. She wondered if there could be anything wrong about her appearance ; and, jumping up, went to the glass at the side of the room to look at herself. No ; there was nothing very extraordinary about her ; and her plain black gown was plainness and simplicity itself.

She took up her little black bonnet, and turned it round doubtfully. True, it might not be the very latest

fashion; but it was a very small and unassuming affair, certainly not calculated to attract attention. Could it be the fur cape she had got? No; she had seen dozens of them already—and, oh! here he was.

“Oh! how late you are,” she cried, gaily—she was so glad to see him.

“I am rather late, my sweetheart,” he said, very tenderly. “Are you very angry with me?”

“Angry? Why, no. But I was getting very impatient, that was all; and oh! Val, such a dreadful thing has happened to me, you can’t think”; and forthwith she related to him all the dreadful experience of the afternoon.

Valentine Harrington only laughed. “You will get used to all that, my dearest,” he said, indulgently. “You are young and too stylish-looking to be seen out alone on foot, particularly in the Strand. Of course there are plenty of pretty and stylish-looking women who have to go in the Strand, but they all know their way about and look it. You are so unmistakeably a stranger that you must be careful how you go about by yourself. You see, you are very pretty and very smart-looking too.”

“Smart,” repeated Rachel, in something like dismay; then glanced down her sable attire, and looked up at him in genuine perplexity. “Smart? I? In these black things?”

“Oh! I don’t mean gaudy,” he explained—he had picked up the last new society phrase already; she could not think what he meant—“but smart in the sense of looking fashionable and ladylike and all that. Well, my darling, I must humbly beg your pardon for being so late; but the fact is, I was kept from coming

by important business ; and, by the bye, we can't really talk here. I wonder if they can give us a private sitting-room? At all events, I will ring and find out."

He rang the bell as he spoke, and when a waiter came to answer the summons, told him that he had some important business matters to talk over with this lady, and would be glad if they could let them have a room in which they would be undisturbed for an hour or so.

The waiter replied that he would enquire, and after a few minutes returned with the information that the proprietor's own sitting-room was at their disposal, if they would follow him.

"You would like some tea, Rachel?" he asked her, as they crossed the entrance.

"I should, very much," she replied.

Eventually, when the tea had come and the door was closed, he left his position on the hearth and knelt down beside her chair.

"I've had such a tiring day, Rachel," he said, wearily, and leant his head upon her shoulders.

"Have you, dear? Let me give you a cup of tea," she answered. "I know it's a woman's remedy, and that men despise it—but try it, and see if it does not do you good."

"I shall despise nothing that *you* give me," he said, tenderly.

She put her arm round him as she would have done round a weary child, and held his head upon her breast, while she made the tea.

"Now get up and sit in that chair," she said, with a gesture towards an easy chair which stood beside the

table. "Yes! Now drink this, and see if it don't cure you."

Valentine Harrington drank the tea, and suffered himself to be made much of, and then put the cup down declaring that he was already nearly himself again.

"I'm a fool to come and bore you like this, dearest," he said humbly; "but the truth is, I've had a trying day and am likely to have a trying evening. I'm afraid, dear, I shall have to leave you alone to-night."

"Will you? Never mind! It will be dull," she admitted, "but if you cannot help it, why you cannot. You see I am paying myself the compliment of imagining that you would spend it with me if you could."

"If I could—Ah! my darling, I would never leave you again for a single moment, if I could follow my own inclination," he declared. "Oh! if we could only follow our own inclination, instead of having to sacrifice everything to the wishes of other people."

"Something has happened to put you out," she said; "Tell me about it?"

For a moment he did not speak.

"Tell me?" she said, persuasively. "If it is something disagreeable I ought to know it and share it."

Valentine gave a great sigh. "Well, dearest," he began reluctantly, "you know that I—that you told me yesterday about the way in which your relations had treated you, that they wouldn't even see you."

"Yes."

"And I left you last night, feeling that there was only one thing for me to do, and yet I could not speak to you first about it."

"Why not?"

"You know, Rachel, I have never talked business to you."

"I know."

"We were so happy on board the *Saracen*, and I felt so sure of the future, so happy, so peaceful, that I never thought I ought perhaps to have told you just all my circumstances."

"But you told me that you were poor—that you hadn't two sixpences to rub together," she cried.

"Yes; I know that I told you that—I've got to tell you the rest now," he said, gloomily. "Well, in brief it is this, darling; my father and mother both died when I was quite a little chap, leaving me without a penny in the world, and if it hadn't been for my godfather I should have gone to the workhouse or to the devil. As it was——"

"Yes?" as he paused—"yes; go on."

"My godfather, upon whom I really hadn't the shadow of a claim except that he was my godfather and had been unusually attached to my parents, and was moreover a rich old fellow without a relation in the world, took me up, took me home with him after my mother died—she only lived three months after my father, poor soul—got me a nurse, then a governess—sent me to Eton, then to Sandhurst—then into the Service—and has allowed me a thousand a year ever since, and calls me his heir."

"How good of him," Rachel cried.

"Yes; he's a good old chap and, by Jove, he's been a good friend to me. And so you see, my darling, although last night I felt that there was only one thing for me to do with regard to you—which is, marry you at once—I felt I couldn't, in common fairness to him, say

anything definite about it until I had sounded him on the subject."

"No, exactly. He has the first claim on you," she exclaimed.

"Of course I didn't mean to ask him for more money, though, of course I shouldn't have refused it if he'd offered to increase my allowance; I thought we might get very well on it, even in a cavalry regiment like the White Horse. And this morning I went down to breakfast with the old chap, intending to talk it over, and see what he said about it."

"And what did he say? or didn't you see him?"

"See him—yes, by Jove, that I did and heard him too," returned Val ruefully; "I wish I had heard a little less of him."

"But why?" said Rachel, beginning to guess at the truth. "Did he refuse you, Val?"

The piteous little trembling voice was almost too much for him.

"Refused me; yes, my darling. He won't hear of my marrying anybody at any price."

"Then it has nothing to do with me?"

"With you—no, except that he won't hear of my marrying you. Why, he wouldn't even hear your name, or who you belonged to, or anything about you. 'Some scheming adventuress you've picked up out there,' he roared. 'No, sir, I won't give my consent to any such tomfoolery, certainly not. Let me hear no more about it, not another word, or upon my soul, sir, I'll wash my hands of you entirely.' And so," Valentine Harrington ended ruefully, "he is perfectly capable of doing."

"You think he will not relent?"

"I am certain of it—his word with him is law; absolute, unchangeable, unbreakable law! So, darling, you see the fix I am in. I want to marry you—oh!" putting his arm round her and holding her close to him, "how I do want to marry you; but—but——"

"But your godfather won't have it," she ended. "Oh! Val, Val, there must be some strange ill-luck about me—nobody seems to want me—my people won't have me at any price, and neither will yours."

"But I want you," he murmured fondly.

"You want me, yes!" she said drearily. "But you have got to do without me—you have got to do without me."

For a moment there was a dead silence; then Val nerved himself by an effort to speak.

"You do love me, Rachel?" he said.

"Oh! Val," she cried reproachfully.

"Yes, I know it. I only wanted to hear again from your own lips. Rachel, darling, is it so certain that I must do without you?"

"How—what do you mean?"

"Mean—Rachel dear, can we not seem to give way to my godfather's will? It is not like anything else; it is a matter purely personal to ourselves; it concerns no one but ourselves, and we do love each other so dearly. It is not right that we should be forced apart in this way."

"I don't quite understand you, Val."

"Oh! Rachel, it's so simple, after all. Don't you see that although my godfather won't give his consent, there is no real reason why we should part from one another?"

"You mean a private marriage?"

"I mean—— Rachel, dearest love, listen to me. If I marry at all, I shall be disinherited. The old man is so determined I shall not marry in his life-time that he has gone this afternoon to his lawyers to have a new codicil put to his will to the effect that if I am married at the time of his death I shall lose every farthing. It is not fair, it is not just. He has brought me up with expensive habits and put me into a profession by which I cannot make enough to live on; and then, just to suit his own will and caprice, he raises this objection to my marrying anybody—not merely you, but *anybody*. It is not just—but what can I do? I am helpless. He says he has brought me up as his own son and that he has a right to expect I shall do as he wishes; and his wish is that I shall not marry during his life-time."

"In a measure he is right," said Rachel, decidedly
"There is nothing for us but to wait."

"Rachel," said Harrington, passionately; "he is old, but he is not too old to keep us waiting for ten or even fifteen years. We *can't* wait all that time. Do you once remember my asking you if you thought you would ever make a great sacrifice for me?"

"Yes."

"And do you remember your answer?"

"Yes."

"Well, darling, the time has come—I little thought then that it would come in this way—when I do ask you to make a sacrifice for me, a great sacrifice."

Rachel put his arm away from her and got up from her chair, standing up straight and tall in the ruddy fire light. "There must be something very horrible about me," she said, in a low pained thrilling voice;

"I go out into the street in broad daylight, and men I have never seen accost me as if I were what the man I love asks me to become."

Harrington caught her in his arms. "But you do love me, darling?" he said, catching at the smallest word in his favour which might fall from her lips.

"Ten minutes ago," she said, looking straight into his eyes with something in hers which he had never seen there before, something which awed him and seemed to freeze his own tender words upon his lips. "Ten minutes ago I believed that I loved you with all my heart and soul. *Now* I know that I do not love you as much as I thought."

"What? You don't love me?" he said.

"Not well enough to become your mistress," she answered, steadily; "not well enough for that."

"But, Rachel—my darling, my love," he exclaimed.

"It is no use to talk about it," she said, with calm decision. "I shall think no differently if we talk for ten hours or ten years about it. You may be right in asking me to make this sacrifice for you—I don't know; I don't try to judge you. I only know that I am not the sort of woman who makes a sacrifice of that kind. If I did make it, I should not be happy for a week—a week," she repeated bitterly; "not for an hour."

"And you are going to give me up like this?" he said reproachfully. "You can coolly renounce me and give me up as easily as this?"

"I have not renounced you. I have only told you," she answered, "that I will not do what you ask of me. As to living without you easily—why, I have not yet

tried what life without you is like," and then she held out her slender hand to him—"Good-bye."

"Good-bye," he echoed. "Why, Rachel, have you nothing else to say to me?"

"There is nothing more to be said," she answered in a very low voice.





CHAPTER X.

ALONE IN THE WORLD.

"The word that once escapes the tongue cannot be recalled; the arrow cannot be detained which has once sped from the bow."—

ITALIAN.

"Honest labour bears a lovely face."—DEKLER.

"IN any case you will do nothing without telling me?" were Harrington's last imploring words to Rachel ere he left her. "I will come again first thing in the morning; and remember, my darling—for although I have vexed you and hurt you, you are my darling still, nothing can ever alter that—remember, my darling, that whether you reject me altogether or decide to wait, *I shall never give you up—never!* Whenever you want anything doing I shall always be there to do it, and—and—oh! Rachel, my love—my dearest," he broke off sharply, "for God's sake don't look like that."

In truth Rachel had turned upon him a face so stony, so full of dumb-frozen pain, that a sudden awful dread began to knock loudly at his heart; he caught her in his arms with what was almost a cry. "Rachel, Rachel," he cried, "my darling, don't say that I have lost you?"

She looked at him with her great mournful eyes, soft and shy no longer, but darkened with pain. "I do not

know," she said simply. "But you have hurt me and I wish you would go away. I want to be alone."

"But I may come back?" he urged.

"Yes—you may come back," she answered.

With this he had to be content, and as time pressed hard, he had no choice but to go. But he did not go without kissing her. "I shall come in the morning," he said, then after a moment's hesitation, asked humbly, "Won't you give me one kiss, Rachel?"

She was still standing where she had stood for some time, suffering his arm to remain around her just as she had suffered his caresses in apathy and silence; but at his words she turned and looked at him again, then suddenly put her arms round his neck and kissed him passionately.

"Good-bye," she said.

"Till to-morrow," he added.

Rachel Power let her arms fall to her side; she said nothing at all about to-morrow.

At last he was really gone and she was free to sit down and think it all over; but not there! No. She rang the bell, and asked them to send her some tea up to her room, for she felt that dinner would be an impossible feast for her that evening; and then she went upstairs and sat down before the fire, which was a luxury she had not been able to deny herself so far, indeed, she had not thought it necessary to deny herself in that way.

And then she began to think. Scarcely to think about her lover; for as she had said half-an-hour before, there was nothing more to be said, neither was there anything more to be thought. Thinking would not alter the fact that he had asked her to become his mistress. True,

he had glossed over the ugly word, had hinted at it rather than actually suggested it, he had cleverly freed himself from all blame, and somehow had contrived to convey to her that in making this sacrifice for him she would have an opportunity of showing the nobility of her character and the depth of her affection.

Well, well, it was no use thinking of all that now. She had had a dream, a bright beautiful dream in which there was a hero with a heart of pure gold, and a future without a cloud to darken it. Poor child! the dream was over and she was awake now, awake to the knowledge that it had been no more than a dream and that the golden heart of her hero was only dross. She was awake, too, to the fact that she was alone in London; aye and for that matter, alone in the world!

I must tell you that Rachel Power was not one of those women, those blissfully constituted women, who, when in trouble, can sit down and have what is called "a good cry," and feel all the better for it. No, she just sat before the fire and waited for her tea, and even her best friend might have watched her without finding out that there was much amiss with her. And yet, within that quiet exterior, she was on fire, and heart and brain were throbbing painfully to the tune of that one dreadful word—alone! alone! alone!

Then a waiter came with the tea and some rolls and butter, asking also if the lady would dine there that evening.

"No!" answered Rachel, "I have a headache, I cannot eat any dinner. If I feel inclined to have anything later I will let you know."

"Very good, madam," he said, and departed

Then Rachel poured herself out a cup of the tea, which was very hot and very strong and very good. They had sent her a little jug of cream too, and some nice little buns as well as the rolls and butter—quite a tempting little meal in fact—yet Rachel could not enjoy it because of that dreadful word still ringing in her ears.

Then, with an effort, she shook herself together, and forced herself to eat a mouthful of bun, and to drink the hot and fragrant tea. The bun, however, proved to be beyond her powers, with the exception of the single mouthful, which she swallowed as if it were poison. But the tea she found easy enough, and having drank the whole of the cup, began to feel a little less forlorn and wretched.

After all she had still her art and nothing could take that from her while she kept her senses.

“And I shall not lose my senses, bad as I feel about it all,” she said wisely, as she stirred her second cup of tea. “Yes, I have my art, and I must work and work and work, if only to help myself to forget—every-thing.”

Then she began to calculate how she should best lay out her money so as to start work at once under the most favourable conditions. She would have to leave the hotel to-morrow, of course, for she would not be able to afford anything so expensive in the way of living. She supposed she would have to have rooms somewhere, unless she could find a regular pension for art-students, like the house she had lived in in Rome! But where and how was she to find such a house—that was the question!

Then suddenly the light poured in upon her perplexed brain—Mrs. Damas! She would go and find Mrs. Damas. There was the very woman who would

manage everything for her, who would help her in every way. Alone, why what nonsense she had been thinking—Alone! Not while she had a friend like Dorothy Damas.

In less than two minutes she had got her box open and was hunting for the book in which she had written down Mrs. Damas's address—here it was, a little red-bound book, and here was the page—

Mrs. Damas,

12, S. Kensington Square,

London, S.W.

"I will go to her now," exclaimed Rachel excitedly.

She was not long in getting ready; in fact, she slipped on her hat and coat and put on her furs without so much as looking once in the glass. Then she locked her box and looked at her watch—a quarter to eight. Oh! if only Dorothy Damas was at home.

"Call me a cab, please," she said to the porter, when she reached the hall.

"'Ansom, Miss?" he asked.

"Yes, please."

"Where to, Miss?" he asked, when he had helped her in.

Rachel's first impulse was to give the address.

"Stay," she said, "tell me how far it is to South Kensington?"

"What part of South Kensington—the station?"

She caught eagerly at the suggestion; certainly it would be much better to leave no address behind her, and then he would not know where to find her.

"Yes, the station."

"About three miles, Miss." Then to the man,—

"South Kensington Station, cabby."

"As soon as they got well down Piccadilly she gave the address to the cabman, and then gave herself up to thinking of the future again. She wondered, too, if Mrs. Damas would be at home. Dear Dorothy; how surprised she would be to see her, and how glad—yes, in spite of all the shocks and surprises she had gone through of late, she felt perfectly sure that Dorothy would be very glad.

At last the cab turned into a large square of tall and handsome houses, and pulled up sharp at the door of No. 12.

Rachel got out and handed up the fare to the cabman,—one liberal enough to make him touch his hat and thank her civilly. Then she went up the steps and rang vigorously.

"Is Mrs. Damas at home?" she asked of the maid who opened the door.

The servant hesitated. "Well, ma'am, she is dressing to go to a party," she answered; "I am afraid she won't be able to see you."

"Perhaps not, but you can ask her," said Rachel. "Give her this," handing a card, "and beg her to see me, if possible; my business is most important."

"Certainly; will you walk into this room, ma'am?"

So Rachel walked into one of the cosiest and prettiest sitting-rooms that she had ever seen; all white and yellow, with a faint tinge of blue about the walls and a great deal of blue and white china set out on the various cabinets and tables. And in less than two minutes there was a rush of feet upon the stairs, and a tall woman in a loose white tea-gown, came running in, and, with an exclamation of surprise and joy, clasped Rachel in her arms and kissed her again and again.

"My dear, my dear, how glad I am to see you!" she cried impulsively. "What lucky wind has blown you this way? Nay, take off your things at once, and let me look at you. Why, Rachel, my dear, you are in mourning; I hope it is not——"

"It is for my father," answered Rachel simply. "I am quite alone in the world now."

Mrs. Damas was busy unfastening the hooks which secured the bear-skin cape—but she broke off short, and threw her arms about the girl very kindly.

"My poor child, I am so grieved for you," she murmured; "and you have come home to——"

"To work," said Rachel promptly.

"And where are you staying? When did you come?"

"I came the day before yesterday, and I am staying at Morley's," Rachel answered. "But you are going out, Dorothy."

"Don't think of that—there is plenty of time. Eleven o'clock will be early enough. Now, sit down here and tell me everything."

Thus encouraged, Rachel sat down and gave Mrs. Damas the outline of her story, and related the circumstances in which she was left as regarded money, and under which she had come home. She exaggerated nothing and concealed nothing, except the name of the man whom she loved.

"I will tell you that too, if you particularly wish it," she said, looking at her bright energetic successful friend with all her mournful soul in her wistful eyes.

"No, dearie, no; don't tell me that—it is not necessary. I understand it all without that."

"I am sure that he loved me," Rachel ventured to say, stung into a defence of Val by some inflexion in Mrs. Damas's voice. "He would never have suggested——"

"If you'd been an heiress?" ended the artist snrewdly. "No, no, dear, they never do. They're all alike, these men; there's not a pin to choose amongst them. So long as it's all smooth sailing and the wheels are well oiled, their devotion is undying, a thing to dream of; but when it comes to a hard-and-fast choice between the girl they love and the money they want—why, the girl goes to the wall. They're all alike my dear, and by the time you're as old as *I* am you'll have got used to it. But meantime going to the wall isn't exactly a pleasant process—is it?"

"I suppose that's about it," Rachel admitted somewhat ruefully, for up to now she had not looked at the matter quite in that light. "However, that is easily settled—I have done with him now; there will never be anything between us again."

"Are you sure?" significantly.

"I hope I set a better value on myself than that, Dorothy," said Rachel, with a flush and a certain air of dignity which made her friend's heart warm more and more to her.

"You'll do, my dear!" she cried. "Well, go on."

"I want to work—to give my whole life to painting; to make not only a living, but a name. And I want you to advise me how best to set about doing it! Will you do this for me, Dorothy?"

"My dear girl," cried Mrs. Damas, "I'll do a good deal more than that for you. We were friends in the old days in Rome, when I was only just beginning to

know what success really meant. I liked you then—though you were a dozen years younger than I—and I like you just the same now. I will help you all I can, all I know. But first tell me, Rachel, what ideas you have formed yourself.”

“I thought,” said Rachel, “that I had better get a couple of rooms, though I haven’t the faintest idea where, or how much to pay for them, or anything. And then I thought that I’d better get a studio, or share one, or something. I thought you would be able to put me up to all that.

“And then——”

“Then I am going *to work*,” she said, resolutely. “I am going to make a name if I can, and——”

“And let them all see,” ended Dorothy Damas, drily. “You couldn’t have a better spur to your ambition, my dear—I know it myself from my own experience. I daresay if we were all very rich and very happy and all the rest of it, heaven-born genius, if we have it in us, would be bound to come out and show itself—but I rather doubt it. No, for making a name in the present state of society, give me, in preference to heaven-born genius, a steady respectable talent and an ambition to impress one’s various relations, and let them know that there is good deal more in us than they ever gave us credit for. At all events, you see what the combination has done for me.”

“I don’t dare to think I shall ever equal you,” said Rachel, modestly.

“I think it is more than likely that you will outstrip me and leave me far behind,” Mrs. Damas said, laying a kind strong hand upon Rachel’s. “At all events, if I can help you to do it, I will.”

"How good you are," said the girl gratefully, then hesitated a moment, looked at the older woman wistfully, and suddenly bent down and kissed the strong firm hand still lying on her own. "And you will tell me just what to do, and what hotel I had better go to for to-night? I want to get away from Morley's, because he will come back in the morning, and I don't mean to see him any more."

"That's right; it's best to be brave and get the wrench over at once, my dear," put in Mrs. Damas approvingly.

"I have money to go on with," Rachel began, but Mrs. Damas interrupted her.

"Stay, dear; before you tell me anything more of your circumstances, let me say what is in my mind. Come to me! I am a successful woman, with a house three times as big as I really need, only I am bound in a measure to keep up a certain appearance. I am as utterly alone in the world as you are—so come to me; be my friend, my companion, and share my studio; or if you find you don't work so well with me there, I will give you a room with a north light, at the top of the house. If you have enough money to do it, you can pay me a fixed sum for everything. If you have not, you can let it run on, and pay me when you have made a name."

"And if I never make a name?" Rachel suggested.

"I shall be no worse off than I was before. The house is here, the furniture is here, the studio is here, and a second one will cost but a trifle to fit up, if you need it."

"But I am not actually destitute; I have nearly a thousand pounds," Rachel explained.

"Then keep it, my dear—keep it. Never break into your capital; it is a golden rule. Nearly a thousand pounds—h'm! Five-and-thirty pounds a year—perhaps a little more—not really enough for your dress and painting materials. Better say, when you are making money you will pay me a hundred a year; and till you *make* it, let it go on. Now, what do you say?"

"Say! Why, what can I say except that I can't find words to thank you, Dorothy?" Rachel cried. "What will I do? Why, I will come and—and work. Oh! you shall see how I will work."

"I have seen you **work**," said Mrs. Damas quietly; "else, fond as I am of you, do you think a busy woman like me would be bothered with you? I can tell you, I wouldn't."

"And now I will go," exclaimed Rachel rising, "or you will lose your party altogether; only tell me what hotel I had better go to."

"To none. Françoise shall go back with you—you remember Françoise? she is with me still—and help you to bring your things back at once—no, not a word, my dear; I insist upon it. No, the servants won't mind the trouble at all; they are devoted to me, and will do anything for me. And now, dearie, I will go along to my party, and come back as early as I can."

She kissed her kindly as the door opened and Françoise appeared in answer to her summons. To her Mrs. Damas gave some rapid instructions about fetching Miss Power's things, and having something to eat ready by the time they returned.

"And tell the others, Françoise," she ended, "that

Miss Power is an old, old friend of mine, and is going to stay with me for the next few months—probably altogether; and that I hope they will do everything they can to make her happy and comfortable.”

And that was the end of Rachel Power's first day alone in the world.





CHAPTER XI.

A FRESH START.

“Work constantly and diligently at something or other; for idleness is the devil’s snare for small and great.”—

“LIFE OF PERTHES.”

“There is no road too long for the man who advances without undue haste; there are no honours too distant to the man who prepares himself for them with patience.”—LA BRUYÈRE.

WITH Mrs. Damas’s maid Françoise as her body-guard, Rachel Power went back to the hotel in which she had suffered the most cruel blow that had ever fallen upon her. A few minutes was enough for her to put her things together and pay for what she owed; and then she saw her boxes carried out, and felt at last that she was fairly safe from pursuit—for she had but little doubt that Valentine Harrington would pursue her, or at least try to do so.

“Where to?” asked the porter as he shut the door.

“Home,” answered the maid sharply; she had had her instructions from her mistress, and had her answer ready.

Rachel sank back with a sigh of relief. At last the dearest link which bound her to the old life was completely broken; and for the future her life would be among Bohemians, with whom such men as had been her ideals before find but little favour.

Poor Rachel's heart was torn in different ways. She had seen a good deal of Bohemian life in Rome, and she did not know that it is about as different to Bohemian life in London as chalk is to cheese. She did not know, in fact, that in London there are two distinct sets which may be called Bohemian—the Bohemians who habitually eat without a table-cloth, and the Bohemians who are merely a little unconventional—which are, in truth, just about as different to one another as the real army-man—quiet, modest, well-dressed—is to the army man of the modern dramatist, who thinks no more of calling his brother-officer a cad before his manservant than he does of eating salt with his egg at breakfast.

Now, during all her life Rachel had been brought up to think spruceness and smartness the great aim and object of a man's appearance, and during the long jolting drive—for from Charing Cross to South Kensington is a long way, let me tell you, in a four-wheeler—she was trying to look forward and think what her future life would be like; trying to realise that for her the smooth well-cropped head and neat feet were memories of a happy past, and that the men with whom she would associate in the days to come would all be untidy and artistic-looking, with long hair and wide collars, with shapeless soft hats and trousers that had got queer about the knees. She wondered, with a pang of dismay, if she were to be walking in the street one day, and one or two of these gentlemen happened to meet her and walk back with her as they had often done in Rome, what should she do if they chanced to meet with Valentine Harrington? They might be true as steel and clever as—as—daylight (she could not think of a better

simile), and he might be—nay, he was—as false as he was high, and yet in her heart Rachel Power knew that she would rather far be jilted by Valentine Harrington than settle down contentedly to a life's devotion from a man with a shock head, a wild eye, and an absolute disregard for his clothes and his tablecloth alike. I do not seek to defend her, nor to hold her up as a pattern heroine—poor child, she did neither herself—I only say that this was the frame of mind in which she went to take up her new life at No. 12, South Kensington Square. Poor child! it was a frame of mind which did not, happily for her, last very long. Very soon she found that the young men who had been the shaggiest and the untidiest of all those whom she had known in Rome were among the sprucest and smartest of Mrs. Damas's acquaintance; the young men who had worn the softest and most shapeless hats in Rome wore the shiniest and most approved shape of tall hats in London; those who had been the wildest of eye and the most Bohemian in manner there, seemed to her to be the most quiet and conventional here. Well, it was good to her that it was so.

She soon found too that Mrs. Damas did not cultivate Bohemian society only. Society people found their way to her large and lovely studio, and drank fragrant tea out of valuable little crown Derby cups, and looked at her pictures and listened to the music, if there happened to be any, and wondered if that odd-looking man was a celebrity, or if such-and-such a woman was anyone out of the common. Generally it proved that the odd-looking men were nobody in the least interesting, and that the strangely-dressed women were the merest outsiders of the great Bohemian world—generally they

found that the celebrities were no more odd-looking than Mrs. Damas herself who, clad in a well-cut and well-fitting tailor-gown, moved to and fro among her guests—a brilliant vivacious woman stamped with the rare impress of personal power.

But this was only one side of Rachel Power's new life. The chief end and aim of her existence at this time was work, only hard work. And work she did, day and night.

"I shall only stop," she said to Mrs. Damas on the first day of their new arrangement, "on one condition; that is that you never consider me in the least, any more than you would consider a chair or a table."

"But, my dear——" Mrs. Damas began, not altogether understanding.

"I mean in this way," said Rachel, laying her hand affectionately upon her friend's, "I am in deep mourning; I have had a cruel loss and a cruel disappointment within the last three months—three months," with a sob, "why my darling was alive and well three months ago—and I don't want to go anywhere. I only want to keep out of everyone's way and work like a slave, work like—like—well, like a desperate woman who wants to forget that she ever lived before; and I want you to promise to go everywhere just the same, and to promise me that you will never feel even sorry to leave me behind."

"But, my dear——" cried Mrs. Damas again.

"Yes. I know," Rachel answered, "it will be much better for me to forget, and I shall forget everything far sooner in society than I shall do out of it. Yes, I know—but I want to get a picture in the Academy, and to make something of a name before I go anywhere. Don't

you understand that I don't want to meet my grandfather or—or—*him* before I have done something to show that I was too good to throw over as they threw me over."

"My dear," said the artist kindly, "you shall do exactly as you like; only, don't think you can even be seen here without being known. Not a bit of it—the first journalist who comes in will say, 'Who is the lady who is using your studio? Oh! Miss Power. Clever—very! H'm!'" and then they will go away and make a nice little paragraph about the rising young painter who is working for fame under our dear Mrs. Damas's wing. Then the next one will want to improve upon that; he will hear me call you Rachel—and the next day Miss Rachel Power's new picture will be discussed in all its lights, or her gown, or her face, or something. So, my dear, don't think that in hiding yourself here, you will hide yourself from either your grandfather or your—your old lover. That would be a very ostrich-like proceeding, I assure you."

"What am I to do then?" exclaimed Rachel in a scared tone.

"If you are really anxious to keep your whereabouts from their knowledge I should certainly advise you to take another name. No, don't look so shocked; many painters and writers and actors do it. It is often a mere convenience—anyway, nobody looks upon it as a dishonesty. Sometimes we know their real names, more often we neither know nor seek to know them. For, after all, what does it matter? It's not the name but the person that makes the difference."

"And you would seriously advise me to do that?" Rachel asked.

"I seriously would," Mrs. Damas replied.

"What name would you take?"

"A pretty-sounding one; that is a far more important matter than you might believe at first."

"If you think it best for me, I will do it; but it will be difficult to choose one—for me, at least, unless you can help me," Rachel answered.

"Oh, no; it is an easy matter," cried Mrs. Damas gaily. "Now, let me see—Rachel Power. We want something quite different to that. Mona McRay! Fairly good—scarcely euphonious enough. Mona Dalrymple—too long, eh? Stay, I have it—Ray Dudley! That's the very thing—and it will be as easy for me to call you Ray as Rachel."

So Rachel Power became a name of the past, and the young painter, who had taken shelter under Mrs. Damas's brilliant wing, was introduced to such of the world as came to No. 12, South Kensington Square, as Miss Ray Dudley; and on the whole very kindly did the world take to the new aspirant for its favour and approbation.

It was wonderful, too, how soon and how easily Rachel got used to the new state of affairs, and how, after the first few days, she answered quite naturally to her new name. On the whole, although she kept strictly to her original plan of not going out, she had a tolerably gay time, for Mrs. Damas's beautiful studio was one of the popular *salons* where men and women loved to gather together. Yet, she did work—worked in fact, so well that, by dint of going to bed every night at ten o'clock and getting up every morning at six, she was able by the time Show-Sunday came round to get her picture ready for sending in to run the gauntlet of the august Forty!



CHAPTER XII.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

"Love ever, love only, love faithfully, love to the last."

—MULOCK.

"Duty commands us to look neither to the right nor to the left, but straight onward."—HARE.

IT was Show-Sunday. Nearly all the previous day the faithful Francine and another of the maids had been busy setting the studio in order and making ready for the stream of visitors who would come to see the pictures prepared for the Academy.

On Saturday Mrs. Damas had industriously gone the round of other studios, and she had gone alone.

"You had much better come, Ray," she said at the last moment, after vainly exhausting all her arguments to get Rachel out of her shell.

"Not this time, dear," answered Rachel, who was copying an illumination from an old Book of Hours.

"It will do you good, and it's not like a society affair," Mrs. Damas urged.

"Not this time, dear," answered Rachel; so Mrs. Damas, with a sigh, went off alone.

"I looked in at nine studios," she said triumphantly, when she came back again several hours later, "and I

don't see anything better than my own, and nothing half as original as yours."

"That's good," returned Rachel calmly. "When mine comes back again we shall have the satisfaction of thinking the Forty are as blind as bats and as stupid as owls."

"It won't come back," said Mrs. Damas a little crossly. As a matter of fact, she had set her heart and soul upon Rachel's picture getting accepted, and Rachel's want of belief in its merits made her feel almost angry with the girl, as if, poor child, it was possible that for her to have a humble opinion of herself and her picture would in the least affect the fiat of the powers that be at Burlington House. She swept across the big studio to the picture and eyed it closely.

"It's a splendid thing," she said enthusiastically. "You ought to be very proud of it, Ray, and of yourself too."

Rachel had followed her, and stole her arm about her neck. "Dear Dorothy," she said, with something very like a sob in her voice, "what have I to be proud of? Who but yourself has ever believed in me or cared what became of me—since I came to London, at least? I am proud of one thing—that is, of being your friend. I am proud of that."

"Silly child," murmured the painter.

And now it was Show-Sunday. Rachel and Mrs. Damas had put the last touches to the studio, had set great clusters of golden daffodils against the dark oaken dado, and on the tall carved chimney-shelf, had set out the quaint screens and hung up gorgeous broideries, until the whole place looked like some Eastern palace.

It was a large and lofty room, with an open-pointed

roof, and Gothic windows filled with stained glass looking into the street which led into the square. On the other side to them were windows high up in the wall, put to catch the full north light, and over both these and the quaint Gothic ones on the other side of the room, were hung arrangements by which either could, by the turn of a handle, be closely curtained over. In a decorative sense the room was exquisitely got up. There were old oak presses, as dark as the dado and as quaintly carved as the tall chimney-shelf, set out with huge bowls and tall vases; and there was a great tray of Moorish brass-work filled with old silver trifles as costly as they were beautiful. There was a suit of armour in one corner and a gorgeous screen of peacocks' feathers in another. Here was a round table of black Bombay wood richly carved—there a large and throne-like chair curiously inlaid with ivory and coloured woods. Here was a quaint old copper coal-pan shaped like a toad—there a superb tiger skin, with the head stuffed and set with gleaming eyes that looked alive.

And now all the finishing touches had been put; every flower was in place, a great fire blazed in the wide grate, and in the midst of all this beauty was the picturesque figure of Dorothy Damas herself.

I use the word picturesque advisedly, because in the artistic world there are many women who have charming and artistic rooms in which they themselves seem the one discordant note. But Dorothy Damas was thoroughly in keeping with her beautiful room; a slender woman, dark and pale, with a wonderful power in the straight gaze of her eyes, a wonderful strength in all her gestures and manner, and a still greater strength in the decided tones of her clear voice.

To-day she had the faintest possible flush on her pale cheeks, and excitement had given a brighter light to the radiant eyes that had made many a man's heart beat hard and fast.

She was not one of the women who wear tea-gowns, who smother themselves in a confused mass of silk and lace and seem unable to move freely in consequence. No; above all things Mrs. Damas was workmanlike and untrammelled in her apparel, and the gown she wore was plain and without much trimming, and fitted her like a glove—a *good* glove, that is to say. But if it was plain it was very rich, made of a flowered brocade on a gray ground which shimmered and flashed as she moved, showing touches of silver and gold as she turned herself here or there.

Beside her in a plain black frock with a soft white frilling at throat and wrists, Rachel looked like a lily of the field against a rare hot-house bloom, and more than once Mrs. Damas expressed her disapproval of the contrast.

"But, dear, there's no reason to wear such deep mourning now," she said vexedly; "it is nearly six months ago, and nobody here knows anything about it. For this occasion, at least, I think you might have made a difference—a white cloth gown with jet trimmings and ribbons would have been charming; or, at least, a silk would have looked lighter than that. It is really obstinate of you, Ray."

"No, dear, it is not so at all," Rachel answered. "I haven't got any money to waste on what other people think."

"As if I would not gladly have made you a present of a frock," grumbled Dorothy Damas vexedly.

"No, you have made me far too many presents already," said Rachel laughing; "and you know, Dorothy, nobody will look at me, and I should hate it if they did. It will be time enough to be stared at when I'm a celebrity—I dare say I shall not mind it then."

"And how do you think you will ever become a celebrity if you sit in a corner and let the whole world pass by you?" cried Mrs. Damas, who believed in seeing and being seen.

"But I hope my picture won't sit in a corner," Rachel laughed. "Listen! There's some one coming. Don't think any more about me and don't look cross for you don't look nice when you're cross," and then the door opened and Françoise announced "Sir Charles Sutton."

After this arrivals began to come thick and fast, and then to pour in in a stream until the large studio was filled to suffocation.

Amongst them all, there being many strangers who did not even know Mrs. Damas by sight, Rachel escaped notice fairly well. She heard a good many criticisms—all more or less favourable to her—of her picture, and one tall young man stopped short in passing it exclaiming,—“By Jove! that's a clever thing. I'd no idea Mrs Damas went in for army subjects.”

“That's not one of Mrs. Damas's,” Rachel heard a man say in reply. “It's done by a friend of hers, who is studying with her or sharing her studio or something. Someone or other told me her name, but I forget. Stay, here it is in the corner—‘Ray Dudley.’ Yes, that was the name. Molyneux told me that she's quite young and very pretty.”

“Knows how to paint a soldier anyway,” said the

first man, still eying the picture. "By Jove! if I was a rich chap I'd buy that."

Many such remarks did Rachel hear, and then, just as she was beginning to feel happy and amused and to think of venturing out of her corner, something happened which almost made her scream with fright, which made her heart beat till she could hardly breathe and some pulse begin throbbing in her throat till she was almost choked; for across the crowd, from the vantage-ground of her height and a thick rug on which she was standing, she saw Valentine Harrington walk into the room.

He was not alone, indeed he was in the wake of two ladies with long-handled glasses, who did not apparently know Mrs. Damas well, for they consulted together a moment and then the elder of the two, and evidently the mother of the younger one, rustled up to Mrs. Damas and seemed to explain herself. That she was somebody of importance Rachel could tell from Dorothy's manner. Then the daughter was introduced to Mrs. Damas, who shook hands with her, and immediately Valentine Harrington was presented. He bowed with his very own air of deference, but Mrs. Damas did not give him her hand—and Rachel was glad of it.

Then the older of the two ladies addressed Mrs. Damas again, and after a moment or so, she saw Dorothy turn towards one of her own pictures as if they had been speaking of it.

The younger lady turned too, then looked back with a coquettish air at Harrington to see if he was following or not; then they too moved towards the picture, and so went a few steps further away from Rachel, who was standing now well sheltered by her own large canvas.

She had a good look at him then, for the girl with whom he had come had her back turned to her and Harrington in talking to her was sideways towards Rachel. She had good sight too, and she saw that he was not a little altered—that he was haggard and looked older.

“Is it possible that he really cared?” she said to herself; and just then the girl, who was rather pretty than otherwise, with a pert little nose, a bright complexion, and a great mass of reddish hair, turned and spoke to him and he burst out laughing.

Rachel shrank back behind her picture as if she had had a blow. No, he had not really cared, or if he had, he had got over it, for even as she watched them she saw him laugh again and try to take a piece of paper which the girl held in her hand; and then they both laughed as if there was a perfect understanding and a great joke between them.

Then all at once Rachel remembered that in staying here watching them she was running a great risk, that even in such a crowd she could not hope to be overlooked, and that as soon as Mrs. Damas had shown the lady her own pictures, she was sure to bring her on to see Rachel’s and that Valentine and the girl would be equally sure to follow in their wake. And if he found her there, it would be good-bye to her chance of peace for the future.

The thought was enough to make Rachel watch eagerly for the first chance of getting across the crowded studio and up to the safe shelter of her own room. Not so quickly but that Harrington, turning round at that moment, caught a glimpse of her or fancied that he did, as she disappeared through the doorway.

"Mrs. Damas," he said, "who is the lady who is here without her hat?"

"Without her hat?" repeated Mrs. Damas vaguely, suddenly brought down from art to every-day-life. "Oh, yes, of course—that was my friend, Miss Dudley, the painter of this picture."

"Ah, yes, yes. I fancied that I knew her but I was wrong," he said, with admirable composure; but all the same, if Rachel's heart was beating like a frightened bird's up in her own bedroom, Valentine Harrington's was thumping like a sledge-hammer down in the crowded studio.

"What do you think of the picture?" Mrs. Damas asked him just then. "Lady Bardinge tells me that you are a soldier, so it ought to interest you."

"It is a wonderful picture," exclaimed Harrington. "And did you say that young lady painted it?"

"She did."

"The one I just asked you about?"

"Yes, she is a great friend of mine and lives with me—Miss Dudley."

"It is marvellous," he repeated. "I wonder if I might ask for the honour of an introduction?"

"Oh, to be sure. Now where is she? I don't see her anywhere," Mrs. Damas replied.

"I saw her go out of the room a moment ago," Harrington told her.

"Then she is gone into the drawing-room," Mrs. Damas said cheerfully, only too glad to be able to introduce so nice-looking a young man to her friend. "Come with me and we will find her."

At this point Lady Bardinge, who was by way of being a very very great lady, interrupted them. "I am

afraid, Mr. Harrington, we cannot wait even to see the painter of this exceedingly clever picture. We have still fifteen studios to get through this afternoon and we have spent quite a long time at Mrs. Damas's."

There was a certain acidity in her tone which reminded him that he had just enjoyed an elaborate luncheon at her house and had been brought round these studios by her and her pert-nosed little daughter, and that not for him just then was the pleasure of running after strange gods or goddesses.

"I think, as Lady Bardinge wants to be getting on, I must not trouble you to-day," he said. "Some other time"—and as the two ladies rustled away—"perhaps you will let me come and see you again some time or other?"

"I shall be very glad to see you," said Mrs. Damas frankly. "Good-bye."

And presently Rachel, who had been watching from her bedroom window which overlooked the street, and had seen Harrington follow the two ladies out and get into a smart open carriage and drive quickly away, came down into the studio again, believing that her absence had been unnoticed. Mrs. Damas, however, was standing near the door when she came in and looked at her sharply.

"Is anything the matter, Ray?" she asked.

"No, dear," in well-feigned surprise.

"Dear child, you look as if you had seen a ghost," Mrs. Damas persisted.

Rachel dropped the mask at once. "So I have," she whispered; "*he* has been here," and passed on.

"I half feared as much," said Mrs. Damas to herself. "And he has asked leave to come and see me. Well, this is a pretty kettle of fish."



CHAPTER XIII.

FAME

"Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away; for, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come; and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land."—SOLOMON.

"To know a man, observe how he wins his object, rather than how he loses it; for when we fail, our pride supports us; when we win, it betrays us."—COTTON.

MRS. DAMAS was perfectly right about Rachel's picture—it was not rejected; and in due time was hung, and hung on the line. Accordingly, Mrs. Damas was radiantly triumphant.

"What did I tell you?" she exclaimed to Rachel when they first heard the news that the picture was accepted. "You knew far more about it than I—of course, of course; that's the way with young people now-a-days—they know everything. In my humble opinion they know far too much—far too much."

So she chatted on, half scolding the girl to keep herself from crying over Rachel's success. But all at once poor Rachel electrified her by trying to laugh and then bursting into floods of passionate tears. In a moment Mrs. Damas had flown to her and caught her in her arms.

"No, no, dearie, don't take it like this; you'll get used to having pictures in the Academy by-and-bye—all in good time. But don't cry like this, my dear, don't—it hurts me so, you can't think—it makes me feel as if I hadn't been kind to you."

"Not kind to me!" cried Rachel, when she found herself able to speak again, "why, Dorothy, you've been an angel of goodness to me. What should I have done and where should I have been now, if it hadn't been for you?"

Mrs. Damas laughed. "Well, I daresay you would have been in some other studio at this precise moment, but the picture would have been in the Academy all the same."

"I don't know," said Rachel sadly; "no one but you would have been bothered with me—not, at least, in such a way as to make me capable of good work. I was poor and friendless, utterly alone in the world, and in great trouble then. I don't think that *any* body but you would have troubled themselves about me then."

"Well, my dear," said Mrs. Damas gaily, "it was a good thing that I happened to be about, if that is so. And now you may console yourself with the certainty of knowing that plenty of people will be only too glad to trouble themselves about you now."

"*If* my picture is lucky enough to get any particular notice," returned Rachel, whose faith in herself was not yet really established.

"*If!*" cried Mrs. Damas scornfully.

Happily for Rachel the picture was marked out at once as one of the most important works in the exhibition. The papers were all full of praise of the new painter, whom rumour reported to be young and pretty. Every day crowds stopped to gaze at what was certainly

one of the most striking pictures in the Academy—such crowds that Mrs. Damas was justified in wondering, impatiently, why Rachel did not have the honour of a barrier? Mrs. Damas wanted all the honours for Rachel.

Truly it was a striking work. Against the dark background of a slate-grey cliff a British Officer lay desperately wounded; standing over him was a comrade, full of fire and brave determination to die hard if he must die at all, and attacking him were three Afghans as determined as himself to win the day. One of them had, however, just received the charge of the Officer's revolver in his lungs and was staggering back, while on the ground lay three other Afghans, dead or dying. Underneath the picture was written—"A Fight for Life."

After this there was no more retirement for Rachel. The general surprise was so great that a young and beautiful girl should have painted a picture so strong in conception, so clever in drawing, so fine in colour, and so faithful in detail, that society in general and painters in particular were eager to welcome her to their midst.

Nor was it only invitations that she was besieged with. Photographers sent asking her to submit herself to them, agents to beg her to let them act for her in all manner of ways, dealers that they might sell her pictures for her, and more than one inquiry came as to the price she was asking for the one then hanging on the walls at Burlington House.

"Put a good price on it, my child," said her friend, Mrs. Damas. "Old Simon has made you a pretty good bid and offers to let you leave it open till the end of the show; but ask nothing under three hundred for a private buyer—Heaven knows! it's little enough."

And whilst they were considering what price she should ask, Françoise came in to say that a gentleman was asking for Miss Dudley.

"Who is it, Françoise?" Rachel asked, her thoughts flying straightway to Val Harrington.

"An old gentleman, Mademoiselle," said Françoise, "He says you do not know him. Here is his card—he has a carriage and pair at the door."

Rachel took up the card.

"Somebody after the picture," said Mrs. Damas in a satisfied tone. "I like them to come—it's a greater compliment than writing. Mind, not a penny under three hundred, my child."

But Rachel did not answer. She was staring at the card with eyes which almost refused to believe what they saw, for the name upon it was "Major-General Vandeleur, 200 Portland Place."

"Dorothy," she gasped, "look at this."

Mrs. Damas took the card and read the name, not for the moment remembering to whom it belonged.

"Well," she said, "what about it? A very man to want to buy a picture."

"But it is my grandfather," Rachel cried.

Mrs. Damas started. "Oh, my dear, I never thought of that! Very likely he has found you out and repented himself of his evil. Anyway, you had better see him—it does not do to fly in the face of grandfathers who live in Portland Place and drive carriages and pairs."

"But——" Rachel began indignantly.

"But you are proud—as proud as he is," ended Mrs. Damas. "I know, I know. He wouldn't have you when you were nobody, and now you don't want him

when you are somebody. Yes, that's the world all over—but it won't do for you Rachel, my dear. Because he has been an old fool, that is no reason why you should be a young one. Two wrongs don't make a right you know; and if he has regretted treating you as he did and has come to make the best of it now, you must be generous and make the best of it too."

"I won't," Rachel began again, when Mrs. Damas interrupted her.

"Remember it was your father's last wish that you should have the advantage of your grandfather's countenance and protection," she said very gravely.

Rachel's heart grew soft instantly. "You are always right, Dorothy," she said, in a gentler voice. "I will see the gentleman, Francine. May he come in here, Dorothy?"

"Certainly, dear," Mrs. Damas answered.

They were then in the studio—Mrs. Damas was just cleaning her palette, having done her work for the day, and Rachel was putting the finishing touches to a small picture of a Highlander in full dress leaning against a stone bastion. As Francine left the studio Mrs. Damas drew a screen in front of her half-finished picture, then went on cleaning her palette. "I'll go when I have done this," she said to Rachel.

"Don't leave me on *any* account," said Rachel imperatively.

So when General Vandeleur was shown into the room, he moved naturally enough to the older of the two ladies, who were evidently both at work.

"Miss Dudley," he began.

"I am Mrs. Damas," said she pleasantly; "that is Miss Dudley."

The handsome courtly old General went up to Rachel and held out his hand. "My dear young lady," he said, "you are but a young painter—I am an old soldier. May I shake hands with you?"

"Surely," returned Rachel quietly. She saw that he had come as a stranger, without having the smallest knowledge of her identity, and she put out her hand and laid it in his so calmly, so quietly, so dispassionately, that she was astonished at herself.

"I must apologise," said the old General, "for venturing to come here without a letter of introduction. I hope you will forgive me. The fact is I have seen your picture in the Academy"—and there he broke off short, as if expecting Rachel to say something.

"Yes?" said she inquiringly.

"It pleases me very much. I have been in Afghanistan, and that picture carries me back more years than I care to own to. Have you sold it?"

"No," said Rachel simply.

"You have had a great many inquiries after it, Ray," broke in Mrs. Damas, who still feared that the girl might give herself away—"and several very good offers. One dealer, indeed, has Miss Dudley's promise of the picture for three figures, if it is not sold when the exhibition closes," she added to the General.

"I am sure that it must have attracted a great deal of attention," said he suavely. "It is an admirable picture. However, I trust that this dealer man will not have the chance of it. He certainly will not if Miss Dudley's price is not utterly beyond my means."

"Miss Dudley is asking——" Mrs. Damas began eagerly, afraid still that Rachel's courage would fail her at the last moment.

"Five hundred pounds," broke in Rachel sharply.

Mrs. Damas bent down again over her palette to hide the smile which she could not repress. General Vandeleur looked relieved and drew a long breath.

"Then the picture is mine," he said triumphantly. "I will send you a cheque for five hundred pounds to-morrow."

"Stay," said Rachel, "that is not quite all, General Vandeleur."

"No? Ah! Some question of engraving, and so on—that right belongs to you, of course," he said quickly.

"No," said she, "it is not a question of engraving. There is something else that I must tell you before you buy my picture. I paint, and for the present, for reasons of my own, I live under the name of Ray Dudley—but it is not my own name."

"My dear Ray," put in Mrs. Damas, "this cannot affect General Vandeleur, or make any difference to the sale of your picture."

"Not at all—not at all," said the old man hastily.

"But it does matter to me very much," said Rachel steadily. "General Vandeleur, my own name is Rachel Power."

She stood up beside her easel, tall and straight and true, with a stronger and more dignified pride than he had ever possessed, plainly visible in the turn of the long white slender throat, the pose of her golden head, the determined set of the pretty rounded chin—stood and looked at him with her wonderful clear grave eyes, which seemed to go through and through him until he felt, poor old courtly arrogant mummy that he was, as if the whole world did not contain, unhung, so monstrous a villain as himself.

"You are Rachel Power?" he gasped—"my granddaughter!"

"Unfortunately, yes," said Rachel coldly.

"My dear, don't say that," he began; but Rachel interrupted him by a gesture of her hand, a very proud and uncompromising gesture indeed.

"Unfortunately, yes," she repeated. "Knowing this, General Vandeleur, if you still care to buy my picture, you can do so; if not, I shall be just as ready to forget that you ever offered to buy it as you could possibly be."

"Certainly, I will buy it," he cried rather hotly. "But—have you nothing else to say to me?"

"What else could I say?" asked Rachel wearily. "Do you want me to remind you how I came back to the land of my forefathers, friendless, alone, poor? How I went to my one living relative, not because *I* wished to go near the man who had disowned my mother, but because I had promised my dear dead father that I would go? Do you want me to remind you how I was turned away from his door like a beggar—yes," as he winced under the words, "like a beggar at the hands of a servant?"

"I—I did not mean ——" he began, when Rachel broke in again, all the weariness gone out of her voice now and only such a mighty scorn there that he fairly shivered under its scathing contemptuous ring——

"You did not mean—what? I daresay your servant did not know that I was your own kith and kin, your own flesh and blood! What matter? He knew that I was a woman—he could see that I was a lady; and yet he had to convey to me a message so brutal that he blushed as he gave it."

"I left no message," broke in the General furiously, but

only too glad of the chance of being able to shift the least little portion of blame on to other shoulders than his own.

"He gave no message," said Rachel contemptuously. "I said that he *conveyed* one. You intended him to do so—did you not? Your servant, sir, is something better than a gentleman, for he was as kind in breaking to me that his task was to get rid of me and to let me know, without putting the fact into plain words, that you had been told of my visit and refused to see me, as any man could be. If you, sir, had been as really courteous as your servant, you would at least have gone to the trouble of sending me a message to my hotel instead of letting me come to your door again to be turned away as if I had been a beggar in the street."

"You are very hard upon me," he said humbly.

"Am I hard?" Rachel cried. "Am I as hard as you have been? I think not. At least, I strike fair to your face—I don't hire somebody else to strike my blows for me. Have I not the right to be hard? *Now*, I dare say, you will be willing to own me——"

"Certainly—I shall be proud as well as willing to proclaim you as my granddaughter," he broke in eagerly.

It was an unwise admission and Rachel was up in arms in a moment.

"And why? Because I have made a success, because my name is on everyone's lips just now, because I have shown you that I can do very well without you—for these reasons you will own me! I thank you greatly."

"And you refuse to let me help you! I can do so in many ways, I assure you," he said quietly.

"When I wanted help, you refused it, sir," answered Rachel proudly. "Now that you offer it to me, I can do without it. It is no credit to you that I did not

when I found myself, alone and almost friendless as I was, turned rudely away from your door, that I did not go headlong to perdition. Happily, I have a great gift which has kept me from temptation of that sort—from its being a temptation, that is to say.”

“Good heavens! You don’t mean to say that you have been offered temptation of that sort?” the old General cried, stung by the significance of her tone.

Rachel bent her head.

“General Vandeleur,” she said, “while we are speaking in language so plain, it would be false modesty in me to pretend that I do not know that I am a beautiful woman. Within a few hours of my second visit to your door, I had been besieged in the street in broad daylight, and the only man I believed in in the world asked me to become his mistress! If I had not had my gift to work for, and my friend here to stand between me and that sort of thing, where do you think I should have been, and whose would have been the blame if I had not found myself able to stand firm against the evil of the world; would it have been yours or mine?”

The old General found it the easiest to waive the question. “You went out in London alone?” he said incredulously.

“And who,” asked Rachel innocently, “was there to go with me? Did you know or care where I went, or how, when you turned me away from your door that day?”

At this point the old man gave in abjectly.

“Rachel,” he said, “you press my sins very hard home upon me. I am sorry I did as I did. I cannot say more. Will you not forgive and forget it all, and remember that this pride has been the habit of five and twenty years—aye, and longer than that?”

Rachel was softened, and, being softened, was conquered in a moment. She gave a sigh, but she laid her hand in the trembling one which he stretched out to her.

"We will try to forget it," she said simply.

"And you will come home with me—you will take your proper position in society as my grandchild," he went on, slipping back into his old habit of command at once. "You can have a studio fitted up at once, and can follow your art just the same."

"No," said Rachel decidedly. "I cannot do that. If you had taken me in when I came to you, I would have been the most dutiful and obedient grandchild in all the world, I think. But since then I have thrown in my lot with the Bohemian world, which thinks nothing of what men and women come from or who they belong to—only what they are and what they can do. I have tasted the sweets of freedom, and for the rest of my life I must be free. You are disappointed—well, I am sorry for that, but I cannot help it. You need not fear for me. I have got over all the worst of my life now. I can take care of myself, I promise you."

"But you—I may come and see you?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. Why not? I am sure Mrs. Damas will not object," Rachel answered.

"I shall not object, I assure you," said Mrs. Damas with a smile.

So the old General went away from the house to which he had gone as a patron, feeling aged and humbled as he had never done in all his life before.

"Rachel," said Mrs. Damas excitedly, as they heard the carriage roll away, "you are a grand woman—I kiss my hand to you."



CHAPTER XIV.

REFLECTIONS.

"Now her looks are coy and cold,
To mine they ne'er reply,
And yet I cease not to behold
The love-light in her eye;
Her very frowns are fairer far
Than smiles of other maidens are."

—HARTLEY COLERIDGE.

WHEN the old General got into his carriage at Mrs Damas's door he did not turn the horses' head in the direction of home—on the contrary he drove away down the Fulham Road at a tidy pace, for he wanted to think it all over.

He was too clever a man to try to blind himself to the truth, and the truth told him that every word the girl had spoken was true—that she had just cause for every reproach she had flung at him, just cause for the blaze of anger in the eyes which he fancied could be very soft at times, just excuse for the scorn and contempt in her cutting tones.

In his whole memory he could not recall ever having had such reproaches flung at him, such looks cast at him; he could not recall ever having been the conscious object of such contemptuous scorn.

Yet, strange to say, he was not angry—and, mind you, taking the nature of the man into consideration,

it was strange. In truth, he was so full of admiration for her beauty and her talents, and of pride for her pluck and fearlessness, that he quite forgot his own outraged dignity and his own pride. What a grand creature she was, how dignified, how lovely, how gifted!—why, even her anger attracted him; he liked her all the better for flinging her hard words at him, and letting him see that she was in very truth his own kith and kin, of the same flesh and blood as himself.

He did not disguise from himself that he had made a huge mistake in refusing to see her. He knew—no one better—that the girl had a just and real claim upon him, and that if, by any chance, she had become chargeable to the parish, he would have had to provide for her necessities.

In all this he knew and admitted to himself that he had been wrong, utterly and completely wrong—and in his rather peculiar mind, once having admitted, if only to himself, that he was wrong, the admission served with him to condone the offence, and he never troubled himself any more about it. I really do not know if a little real genuine arrogance is not an excellent quality to possess—it is to the mind exactly what chloroform is to the body, it deadens all those fine and sensitive feelings which, if indulged too freely, become morbid and depressing; it fully justifies all manner of minor sins, and makes the ways of modern life easy and fairly complaisant. Yes, I think, on the whole it is a very convenient quality to have in one's possession.

Not for the moulding of a fine upright and manly character, you say. Quite so, but have I held General Vandeleur up to your notice as a fine upright and manly character? If so, I did not know it. To me he

is only a proud, arrogant, overbearing old mummy, neither more nor less.

But having admitted Rachel Power, in his own great mind, as a young lady possible and even desirable to introduce to the notice of the world as his grandchild, General Vandeleur set about thinking what he could do to shed a fitting lustre around the path of her daily life, so as to make her absolutely worthy of the honour of being associated with him in the light of a near relative.

She would not go to live with him, not at present at least, though in time he hoped he would be able to overcome all that difficulty. But she must be presented; and the Duchess of West Kensington would be the proper person to see her through that business—he must go and talk to her about it very soon.

And she must have a carriage of her own—that was a matter of course—a neat Victoria, and a little brougham for night use. At least, if he could do nothing else for her he could do that much, and, however independent she might fancy herself to be, General Vandeleur felt pretty sure that she would not, upon reflection, deny him the pleasure of indulging in a whim which would add so materially to her own everyday comfort.

Just at first she might feel disposed to say no, but when he had represented to her, clearly and dispassionately, that by living out of his house, with an absence of all those surroundings which were necessary to her station as his granddaughter, she would actually be doing him an incalculable injury, she would see the force of his arguments and would immediately fall in with his wishes.

He altogether forgot—having salved over his very convenient conscience with that self-heard confession of

all his bygone sins of omission and commission—that he would thus give his granddaughter the opportunity of reminding him that he had not always been so careful of what the world might think of his grandchild's doings, or what the world might say of his denying her the protection of his house and leaving her to roam about London with no better safeguard than her own innocence.

And then, all at once, there came to his mind a remembrance of another person, to whom the taking of his grandchild unto his bosom would make an enormous difference. “Now, by Jove!” said he to himself, “I never thought about that in the least. It never entered my mind that poor Emily would have any children. By Jove! that puts me in a nice hole.”

He turned the horses' heads and drove back to town again, reaching Portland Place just at dinner-time.

“Has Mr. Harrington come?” he asked of the pompous butler.

“He has, sir,” returned the servant, with a solemnity that would not ill have befitted a funeral.

Then he threw open the library door, and General Vandeleur walked briskly into the room like a man with a fresh idea and a new lease of life.

“How are you, my dear lad?” he said in his most affectionate tones.

Valentine Harrington got up and came to meet the old man, who had been father, mother, everything to him ever since he could remember.

“Quite well, thank you, sir,” he answered. “Sharp wind to-day, isn't there?”

“I suppose there is—I haven't felt it,” General Vandeleur answered. “You're feeling the effects of India

yet—eh? I'm better used to it—ha! ha! H'm—five minutes to eight. I won't dress to-night, Val. I'll just go and wash my hands, but I won't dress."

"All right, sir."

In less than five minutes the old man was downstairs again, and when dinner had been announced they went into the handsome dining-room together. They talked a little on more or less indifferent subjects, and once or twice the General looked very sharply at his godson; at last he spoke.

"You are not well, my dear lad," he said.

"I don't feel particularly well, sir," said Valentine, leaning back in his chair and toying with his bread.

"Still hankering after that girl—eh?" remarked the General. They were alone for the moment.

"I shall always hanker after her, sir," said Val briefly.

"Nonsense—nonsense," muttered the old man rather testily.

He did not say any more, for they were no longer alone, and with all his want of consideration for the feelings of others, the old General was not the man to speak on such a subject before an audience. So they got through the meal, the General eating more than he drank, and Valentine drinking more than he ate—considerably more. Then, when the dessert had been handed, and they were alone with their cigarettes, he lost no time in getting on to the subject which just then lay nearest of all subjects to his heart.

"Have you been to the Academy at all this year, Val?" he asked, in a careless casual kind of way.

"Oh, yes, several times," answered Valentine, unsuspiciously.

"Ah! Did you happen to notice a picture called 'A Fight for Life?'"

"By Ray Dudley—oh, yes. I saw it in Mrs. Damas's studio on Show-Sunday," Val replied.

"Oh, did you? Well, I bought it to-day," said the General, more carelessly still.

"You don't say so?" exclaimed Valentine in surprise. "Well, it's a fine picture, sir, and I must congratulate you on your taste. Did you go to a very long figure?"

"Not outrageously so. I gave five hundred for it."

"Five hundred—h'm. It's a fair price, I think."

Valentine Harrington knew but little about the value of pictures, but one of the rules of his life was to always speak on all subjects with the air of an authority; in nine instances out of ten he found it pay.

"Did you see the lady who painted it?" the General inquired, as if he had no real interest in asking the question, and none of any kind in hearing the answer.

"I caught just a glimpse of her," Val replied; "in fact, I asked to be introduced to her, but Lady Bardinge wouldn't wait."

"Ah!" said the General vaguely, adding to himself, "Clever old stager, Lady Bardinge! Wants to catch the lad for little Red-top."

"I promised Mrs. Damas that I'd look in some time or other, but I never did," Valentine went on, not meaning to convey a false impression or pervert the truth, but only explaining the position of affairs after the manner of fashionable people.

"Ah,—well, I'm going there to-morrow and I'll take you with me," said the General. "I should like

you to see Miss Dudley. She's one of the prettiest girls I've met for a long time. When you've given me your opinion about her I'll tell you all her history."

"You know her then?"

"I never set eyes on her until this afternoon," answered the General promptly, "but I know her family—well."

"Very well, sir. What time will you go?"

"At twelve o'clock."

"Shall I come here for you?" he asked.

"Yes, that will be the best—that will be the best," the General answered.

And at that moment, in Mrs. Damas's studio, Rachel was sitting at the piano a-singing—

"'Nay,' said Time, 'we must not bide,
The way is long and the world is wide,
And we must be ready to meet the tide.'"

The tide of the river of—Love.





CHAPTER XV.

SO WE MEET AGAIN.

"We walk through the world like the blind, not knowing whither we are going."—SÉVIGNE.

"The wheel of fortune turns incessantly round, and who can say within himself, 'I shall to-day be uppermost.'"—CONFUCIUS.

GENERAL VANDELEUR had or thought that he had—which, as a general rule, amounts to the same thing—a very good reason for not telling Valentine Harrington at once that the young painter, Ray Dudley, who had set such a mark on the world of art that season, was no other than his own grandchild. And his idea was this. Having recognised Rachel and acknowledged the relationship between them, his mind had naturally placed her at once in the position of his heiress. Then he had remembered how he had pledged himself to Valentine, how he had taken him at the time of his parents' death, had educated him expensively, had brought him up with ideas and habits that were utterly extravagant for a lad who was almost penniless, how he had often and often spoken of him and to him as his heir. Therefore, he could not now turn him adrift, and yet, naturally enough, he could not help wishing that he were able to leave his own grandchild all his wealth, instead of but a portion of it.

His only idea of successfully solving this difficulty was by bringing about a marriage between his granddaughter and his godson, and although to most persons a marriage between two handsome young people might seem an easy enough thing to accomplish, yet General Vandeleur had an uncomfortable remembrance of a conversation he had had with his godson several months before, when the young man had confessed to him that he was in love and wanted to marry.

He had a very uncomfortable remembrance of the merciless way in which he had used his power to what he called *extricate* Valentine out of his difficulty, and he had a sort of instinct that if he were to tell Val that this girl was his granddaughter, that astute young gentleman would see at once what was in his mind and would start an acquaintance under a disadvantage, the disadvantage of a determination to be neither led nor driven into that particular arrangement.

So about half-past twelve the next morning the General's carriage drew up at Mrs. Damas's door. The pupils of the class which she held on that morning of the week were just leaving the house, and most of them glanced with interest at the smart park phaeton just as its occupants glanced at them.

They met Mrs. Damas on the steps leading to the studio. "I am just rushing up to take off this," she said to the General, and looking at her blouse. "One gets so dirty at work, you know. Go into the studio, please; Ray will be down in a few minutes."

"May I present my godson—Mr. Harrington? Or, stay, he does know you, I believe," said the General.

Mrs. Damas looked at him without any recognition in her glance. She was not a long-sighted woman, and it

must be remembered that hundreds of young men were presented to her during the course of a year. She vaguely remembered having seen this one before, but when and where she had not the smallest idea.

"Oh, yes, we have met before," she said pleasantly. "How do you do? Go into the studio, and I will come as soon as I have got rid of this."

So the General and Valentine went on into the large and now rather untidy studio. It bore many signs of recent use, and the open piano was littered with music. The General walked up to Rachel's picture—the one she had been finishing when he found her on the previous day. Valentine Harrington walked to the piano and looked at the music. Someone had been singing, and had left the song open at the middle verse—if he had only known that it was his Rachel! :—

"Stay, steerman, oh, stay thy flight
Down the river of love ;
See, summer is waning fast,
Clouds gather above.
Moor thy bark to the woodland shore,
There to wander alone once more,
Hand in hand, the old sweet way,
Stay, stay, stay !
'Nay,' said Time, 'we must not bide,
The way is long and the world is wide,
And we must be ready to meet the tide.'"

The piano stood behind the door, and the door was shielded by a quaint Moorish screen, so that anyone who was standing by the keyboard could not be seen by another person coming into the room until he or she had got round the screen. So when Rachel came in and walked swiftly up to the old General, she was not aware that there was anyone else in the room.

"I am so sorry to keep you waiting," she said.

"Mrs. Damas's class was late this morning; sometimes they get behind, you know."

"I like to wait for you, my dear," the old General said gallantly, "and—er—I have brought my godson to see you. May I present him to you?"

Rachel turned quickly in the direction indicated by his gesture and saw before her, standing with one hand resting on the corner of the piano, her old lover—Valentine Harrington.

For a moment she felt as if she was going to make a scene—to fall down in a dead faint or burst into hysterical tears. She felt sick and dazed and altogether uncertain of herself—in fact, she could scarcely see him through the blood-red mist which danced in front of her eyes, and a dreadful singing noise which filled her ears made the old General's voice sound like a voice in a far-off place, or as one coming to her through a heavy fog.

"Mr. Valentine Harrington," said the General, thinking from what to him looked like hesitation in her manner, that she was waiting for him to speak and explain his godson further.

For a moment it had no effect on Rachel—then some good angel sent a wave of remembrance of her dead and gone father to her mind and she roused herself out of her confusion and pain. She did more than that too, she went forward and offered him an ice-cold hand which had no pleasure, no sign of recognition about it. She looked him straight in the eyes and said in the tone of an utter stranger, "I am very pleased to meet you," then she dropped his hand and turned back to General Vandeleur again—and so Valentine Harrington knew from that moment that he must not only start afresh

but that he would have to go back and undo everything that he had done in the past.

"Val, I want you to look at *this*," said the General, pointing to Rachel's picture.

Valentine went to look at the picture—still not understanding the position of affairs at all.

"It is a very fine thing," he said, after a moment. "And by the same lady who painted the 'Fight for Life.' Yes, I see there is the signature in the corner. Are you thinking of buying that also, sir?"

Something in his manner told both the General and Rachel that he had not understood that this was Ray Dudley.

"*This* is Miss Dudley, Val," said the General, and when Valentine turned a blank face of astonishment upon Rachel, she only smiled slightly and put out her hands with a deprecating gesture of acquiescence in the statement.

"You surprise me," Valentine gasped, fairly taken aback with astonishment.

Just then Mrs. Damas, radiant and fresh and bright, came in, looking trim and smart in her neat tailor gown and with her dark eyes blazing with the excitement of having Rachel's old grandee of a grandfather come so soon to see her again. She gave him her best attention and at once took him away from the young people—knowing that Rachel would probably rather talk to the most empty-headed young man in London than to the old man who had up to yesterday treated her with such rude want of ordinary humanity.

"I fancy that you take great interest in old engravings, General Vandeleur," she said, when they had exchanged greetings.

The General, as a matter of fact, knew as much as he cared to know about old engravings, which was nothing at all, but he too had an object in leaving the young people together, so he professed himself to Mrs. Damas as not only willing but desperately eager to see the big portfolio of more or less dingy engravings which she flung open on the flat top of the piano for his delectation.

Thus Rachel was left, in a measure, at Valentine Harrington's mercy, and he, you may be sure, did not let the opportunity slip.

"Rachel!" he said in a very low voice—"Won't you even speak to me?"

"Oh, yes—I *have* spoken to you," said Rachel coldly.

"You have addressed several words to me, it is true," he said. "You know that's not what I mean. Come and show me those pictures at the other end of the studio. Do—darling."

She turned her grave gray eyes upon him, then moved away towards the pictures to which he had pointed.

"Don't speak to me like that," she said very coldly. "It is a very great liberty; your acquaintance with me is now a very slight one."

"You are very cruel to me, Rachel," he said reproachfully.

"Am I?" she answered. "Perhaps so. You have not taught me how to be kind."

"I will teach you if you will only let me," he said eagerly.

"Many thanks—but I have learnt the other lesson too thoroughly," she replied in the same chill tones.

Valentine groaned within himself, but he felt that it was no use following up that line any longer.

"It's no use my pretending that I am one of your acquaintances, Rachel," he said with an odd mixture of humility and defiance. "If you can forget the past, I cannot——"

"I have no wish to forget the past," she interrupted. "It is done with for ever. It makes no difference to either of us whether we forget it or not."

"It makes all the difference to me whether you forget it or not," he retorted.

Then there was a moment's silence, and Valentine knew that he had come to another blind alley, so to speak. However, he was not at a loss to know what to talk about, and the General and Mrs. Damas were apparently utterly and entirely absorbed in their old engravings.

"How was it that you never told me that you could do this sort of thing?" he asked, with that ill-used tone under which nine men out of ten generally take refuge when they know that they have been utterly in the wrong. He made a general gesture towards the pictures as he spoke, and Rachel answered quickly and to the point.

"I did not happen to tell you," she said quietly. "I had no desire to keep anything back that you ought to have known—but there was nothing in our intercourse to make me tell you, and somehow I never did tell you. I had not thought then of being in the Academy this year."

"And now you are a great woman," he said in just the old tender tone, so that Rachel shivered as she heard it.

"I hope to be a great woman some day," she answered modestly.

"Some day—oh, you are a great woman now, Rachel—a great woman. All London is talking of you. Why, when General Vandeleur asked me last night to come here to-day, I, sick and weary and tired of everything as you must see I am, I fairly jumped at the chance of seeing you."

"And how came you to know General Vandeleur so well?" she asked suddenly.

"He is my godfather," Valentine answered in some surprise. "Surely I told you all about him! Yes, I am certain I did."

"You told me that you had a godfather," said Rachel. "You never told me his name; not that it matters," she ended, "now."

"And what a strange thing," he said, taking no notice of the last unpleasant word—"that he who was the means of parting us should be the unconscious means of bringing us together again. What an odd thing that my godfather should be your——"

"Valentine, my dear lad, it is time that we went," said General Vandeleur, at that moment—"because Mrs. Damas has an appointment which will only just give her time to get her lunch. So come along. My dear, I should like to have that picture—put your own price upon it."

"A hundred pounds," said Rachel quietly. "It is the same price I offered it to a dealer for yesterday."

"And it is not sold?"

"No—he offered her seventy—then seventy-five—then eighty pounds; then rose to eighty guineas," laughed Mrs. Damas, who, in her own mind, looked upon General Vandeleur as one of the most delightful old persons she had come across for a long time—"and

there he stopped, and there at a hundred pounds Rachel stuck ; and finally they parted to think it over till this evening."

"That dealer is a very sensible person," remarked the General, with satisfaction; "I should like to make his acquaintance."

"I doubt it," cried Mrs. Damas with her merriest laugh.

"I may come again?" said Valentine Harrington, imploringly, to Mrs. Damas as he took her hand.

"Oh, yes—any Saturday afternoon, and the third Sunday evening of the month," she answered pleasantly.

"So many thanks; that will be next Sunday, won't it? I shall come then. Good-bye Miss Dudley—I may come again, I hope?"

"Oh, yes," said Rachel—but the words had a sound which meant "Oh, no," and Valentine Harrington went out into the bright summer sunshine feeling as if the game was all up and Rachel was lost to him for ever.

"Ray, my dear," said Mrs. Damas as soon as the door was closed—"where have I seen that young man before? Did he ever come here with somebody?"

"I have seen him here before," said Rachel, some odd and indefinable instinct prompting her to refrain from reminding Mrs. Damas when and under exactly what circumstances she had seen him before.

"What relation is he to the General—his son?"

"No relation," said Rachel—"only his godson."

"His godson—oh!" said Mrs. Damas; then after a pause—"a handsome young man, Ray."

"Yes," answered Rachel simply.



CHAPTER XVI.

NEW HOPES.

“Let no vain hope deceive the mind;
No happier let us hope to find
To-morrow than to-day
Our golden dreams of yore were bright,
Like them, the present shall delight,
Like them decay.”

—MANRIQUE.

“WHAT do you think of her?” demanded the old General, as they turned out of the square.

“I think she’s the loveliest woman I ever saw in my life,” said Valentine promptly, but looking straight in front of him.

“Ah!” and then the old man paused, in truth scarcely knowing how to put the remark he wanted to make into words, scarcely, indeed—remembering the past, the not very distant past—having the face to suggest a marriage to Valentine at all. “Pity she’s not married,” he said at last, a little awkwardly.

“It is,” returned Valentine, who did not think it was a pity at all, quite the contrary, in fact. “I dare say she will marry, sir, by-and-bye.”

“Oh! I’ve no doubt—no doubt”—said the General rather testily, “but the question is *who* will she marry? *Who* will she marry?”

"He'll be a lucky beggar whoever he is," said Mr. Valentine Harrington, not in the least guessing what his godfather was driving at and feeling that, as far as he was concerned, general terms would be safe.

The General looked sharply round—"You think so, Val?" he asked anxiously.

"Yes, I do," Val answered, promptly.

The General drew a long breath of relief; but he scarcely knew what to say next.

"You will be there on Sunday evening, eh?" he asked, not because he was really desirous of obtaining information on that point, but because he did not want to get off the subject.

"Oh! I think so, sir," Val answered with due solemnity and apparent indifference. "And you?"

"Yes, I shall go. I am anxious to see her in society. Just seeing her in the studio, partly overshadowed too by comparison with Mrs. Damas, who is one of the most brilliant women in London, is scarcely to see her at all."

"You take a great interest in the lady," said Valentine, who began to wonder what all this beating about the bush meant and whether his godfather was thinking of marrying her himself.

The old General laughed. "Well, my lad, if you must have the truth, I've not been very open with you about this matter," he admitted.

Valentine felt perfectly sure that he was right, and his heart began to beat hard and not very regularly in a way which was highly uncomfortable to him. Good Heavens! what if Rachel, just out of a mistaken pride, should go and marry the old man as a sort of proof that she had no forgiveness for the mistake he had made in asking her to make a sacrifice for him! What

should he do then? And how particularly disagreeable and unpleasant every circumstance of his life would be afterwards! In truth, he turned upon the General a face so blank that the old man felt quite guilty.

"The fact was, Val," he said, quite humbly for him, "I—I wanted you to see her without any kind of prejudice in your mind about her! I wanted to have your unbiassed opinion about her——"

"Well?" said Valentine.

"Well—her name is not Ray Dudley at all," said the General. "It is Rachel Power."

"Rachel Power," repeated the young man, who was beginning to feel sick and dazed with the pain of hearing this spun out and as it were "broken" to him.

"And she is my granddaughter" the General said; getting the truth told at last.

Valentine fairly gasped! Not that it mattered—the General took for surprise what was really an expression of intense relief.

"Your—*granddaughter*, sir," he exclaimed, incredulously—"your *granddaughter*."

"Yes; my granddaughter," the General asserted. "And very proud of her I am, Val—very proud of her."

For one moment there was dead silence between them! Through Valentine's brain a confused medley of past events was flying—of how his darling (yes, he called her his darling, having long ago forgiven himself for the slight which he had put upon her)—of how his darling had come home in fear and trembling to her one relation, and had been rudely and unfeelingly rejected and turned from the door of her own kith and kin, as if she had been a beggar; and with the strange un-

reasonableness of weak humanity, at that moment he had forgotten all that the old man had done for him during his whole life, and was only filled with a burning desire to just take him down on to the pavement and thrash him.

General Vandeleur saw something of this in his godson's face ; but he was, as I have had occasion to remark before, an arrogant old mummy who had never troubled himself much about the feelings of others, so it is not surprising that he mistook Valentine's expression then.

"You're thinking about the property, my dear lad," he said, laying his hand affectionately upon the young man's arm. "It will make no difference to you, Val, or very little."

"I was not thinking of money at all, sir," returned Val shortly.

It was true enough. He was thinking of that afternoon when he had gone to Morley's, and found his darling shaking and quivering under the pain of her rejection—he was thinking what an angel of goodness she was to even allow the old autocrat to buy her pictures. And then—then—a sudden joyous thought flashed into his mind—if she could forgive such a brutal slight as that which her grandfather had put upon her; surely, surely, she would be able to forgive him, who had wronged her only through the excess of his love—for that was how he put it—the love which would not let him drag her blindly into poverty and pain for the rest of her life.

It is wonderful how ingeniously men and women can apply the salve of righteousness to their own sadly seared consciences. It is wonderful how we can, most of us, twist and turn the truth so as to make

it suitable to our own wishes. No, I don't mean to tell lies, not at all—to lie is an exceedingly vulgar verb, which nobody in respectable society should be able to conjugate; to tell a story in one's own way is quite a different matter. For instance—it is not very long ago that I was dining at a certain house—not a very large party—where I met two ladies, one a woman of some distinction, the other a pretty woman of no occupation, very anxious to be thought “smart.”

What Mrs. Distinction had done to offend Mrs. Smart I could not pretend to say for I do not know, but from one end of that dinner to the other she could not possibly have taken greater pains to snub any unfortunate lady than she did to snub Mrs. Distinction. And I must admit that I was filled with wonder to guess why a clever quick-witted sharp-tongued woman, such as I knew Mrs. Distinction to be, did not rise up promptly and, so to speak, slay her enemy.

But she did not seem to think of doing it—she allowed herself to be dazzled by Mrs. Smart's brilliant circle of friends, her popularity, her house, and her servants, her “at home” days, and the going out that she managed to get through; in fact, she did rather more than allow herself to be dazzled, she sat open-mouthed, like one thirsting for information.

At last Mrs. Smart abandoned the more or less safe ground of generalities and went into detail—always a dangerous proceeding.

“Do you know Mrs. Van Hyphen?” she asked of Mrs. Distinction.

“No, I can't say I do,” said the other. Mrs. Smart preened herself like a peacock.

“Oh! I know her very well,” she remarked superbly.

"I always enjoy her parties so much! you meet *every* body there."

"Do you really?" said Mrs. Distinction, still with the thirst-for-information air.

"Oh, yes! Of course she is more popular, and more sought after than any other woman in London—*every* body knows that."

"She's such an awful-looking person," Mrs. Distinction put in.

"Oh, that's because she got her complexion *ruined* in India," Mrs. Smart explained. "She was a very beautiful woman once, you know, and she puts this complexion stuff on quite to please her husband—quite on that account. She does not care herself one way or the other, but her husband says to her, 'My dear, you don't look a bit like yourself, unless you do put it on, and I wish you to do it.' Why, she has actually tried to leave off using it, but he always begs her to put it on again."

"Really!" said Mrs. Distinction, quite humbly, "I never heard that story before—I've heard something like it."

So had I—which was, briefly, that Mr. Van Hyphen came home from India to find that his wife had taken to art to conceal, we will not say the progress of time but the ravages of an Oriental clime. "I'll live with no woman who paints her face," he is reported to have said, "so, my dear, I insist upon your coming down in the morning with your face *washed*."

Like an obedient wife, this was what Mrs. Van Hyphen did—but when the husband's astonished eyes beheld her, he called out—"You were quite right—you were quite right! For God's sake go and put it on again!"

It's the same story you see, my dear reader, but with a difference!

Now it was very much after this fashion that Valentine Harrington worked out the difference between *meum* and *tuum*, in conjunction with the verb "to slight," as applied in the past tense to the girl he loved, Rachel Power. As I say, it is a habit with most of us.

"You were not thinking about the property, Val," said the General. "What then? Not about that other girl, I hope."

"That *other* girl!" repeated Valentine, in such genuine amazement that his godfather began for a moment or so to think that the lad was ill, or taking leave of his senses.

"Yes—the girl you wanted to marry when you first came home," he explained testily.

Valentine turned and looked at him as blankly as if he had never heard of "that other girl" in all his life before—at least that was the impression that his looks conveyed to the old General. Then he suddenly remembered that his godfather was utterly ignorant of the fact that he had wished to marry Rachel, and some subtle feeling prompted him to say nothing about it until he had made more way with her and reclaimed some of that affection which he had lost by his own stupid blundering folly.

"Oh! I had forgotten all about that," he said with a laugh.

"I'm glad of that, my boy—I'm glad of that," cried the General gladly. "And you think you'll be good friends with my granddaughter—eh?"

"I hope so, sir," answered Valentine.

Then there was a moment's pause, and just then they turned into Portland Place.

"I want to ask you a plain question, sir," said Valentine quietly.

"Ask it," said the General in reply. "I'll give you a plain answer."

"Well, sir, have you any idea of my marrying Miss Power?" he asked.

"I should be exceedingly happy if you did," the General answered.

Valentine looked straight ahead, too stunned by the unexpected turn which events had taken to speak a word; the General went on speaking.

"Of course, it is early days yet," he began, quite apologetically for him—but Valentine broke in,

"I would marry her to-morrow if she would have me," he said quietly. "To-morrow,—aye, to-day—*now!*"





CHAPTER XVII.

AT HOME IN BOHEMIA.

"Fame, they tell you, is air; but without air there is no life for any; without fame, there is none for the best."—LANDOR.

"Human felicity is made up of many ingredients."—JOHNSON.

I THINK in spite of Mrs. Smart's assertion as to the wide-spread popularity of Mrs. Van Hyphen, that indisputably Mrs. Damas's drawing-rooms and studio were the nearest approach to a *salon* that could be found in London. Sooner or later everybody of any note was to be seen there on Saturday afternoons, or on the third Sunday evening of the month.

On this particular evening, being in the height of the season, there was a larger and more interesting gathering than usual. There were poets and painters, authors and actors, journalists and war correspondents, I might almost say without end.

Mrs. Damas, in a flame-coloured gown, was radiant and happy because she had at last got "her child," as she called Rachel, into a dainty silken frock of ivory white, such as made the young painter, whom everybody wanted to see and know, look younger and fairer than ever. It was a pretty gown too, made with folds everywhere which came up snug and cosily round the arms and were gathered up into mere knots on the shoulders, with

large clasps or brooches of Indian silver. In her hand she carried a posy of beautiful white flowers, brought to her by a great painter, one of the august Forty, who wished to show her special honour, and when Valentine Harrington came in and saw it, he simply cursed himself that he had not had the sense to pay her a similar attention earlier in the day. However, it was no use crying over that particular spilt milk now, so he went up to Rachel with a very proprietorial air and wished her good evening in his best manner, a manner which conveyed to most of those who were thronging around her the information that, now he had come, everybody else might retire from the field as there was not the smallest ghost of a chance of any one of them getting so much as a word in edgeways.

This might have done very well if Rachel had helped him at all by her manner, but she did not, unfortunately for him, do so. And in Bohemian society, in those cases where the lady most concerned makes no difference in her manner to those who are most anxious to talk to her, it takes a wonderful amount of that kind of "side" (oh, refined and gentle critic, forgive me for the use of the word—I have put it in commas so that the pill shall be somewhat sugared for you) which constituted the chief charm of Harrington's manner, to make the men who are sure of their footing in Bohemia accept cold shoulder and betake themselves out of the way.

"Ah! Who's the fellow trying to get Miss Dudley to himself?" one Bohemian asked of another.

"Haven't the least idea. Army man, I fancy," replied the other.

"Ah! What interest does he think he can possibly have for her?" said the first man; then squared himself

up and sauntered across to Miss Dudley with that indescribable man-about-town air of "see me cut him out," with a parting remark of "I'm going to talk to her myself."

Now the experienced woman of fashion, whether it be of Society fashion or Bohemian fashion, can generally contrive to talk most to the men that please her best, and when Rachel turned to the painter and gave him her best attention, Harrington could not quite make out whether it was because she did not want to talk to him, or because she was not already enough used to the ways of that particular class of society to be able to give "the painter-fellow" the cold shoulder.

As a matter of fact Rachel was but too glad to be interrupted. To stand among all these strangers with Harrington beside her in the position of the one person who had known her as Miss Power, was the last wish she had in her mind; and she welcomed the painter, who was young and more than ordinarily successful, with a cordiality which was almost effusive.

"Who is my granddaughter talking to now?" said General Vandeleur to Mrs. Damas just at that moment.

"Oh, that is Pharaoh, the painter," said Mrs. Damas, in a tone which conveyed to him that Mr. Pharaoh was a person of the greatest importance.

"Pharaoh!—Pharaoh!" repeated the General vaguely. As a matter of fact he knew perfectly well who Pharaoh was and what he had done, but he had just seen him unmistakably cut Valentine Harrington out with Rachel, and he resented it accordingly.

"He painted that wonderful picture of 'Cleopatra' in last year's Academy," Mrs. Damas went on—"quite the greatest success of the season; and this year he has

done better work still. Oh, he will be a great man one day—one day! why, he is a great man now,” Mrs. Damas cried, with the genuine warmth with which only a truly great woman ever speaks of another worker in her own line.

“Ah!—really!” returned the General, who, proud as he was of his granddaughter’s success, looked upon the followers of all branches of art as “that sort of person, don’t you know”—“Not much to look at—eh, Mrs. Damas?”

“We think more of what people *are* than what they look like, in our world, General,” said Mrs. Damas brusquely. “But *I* see nothing amiss with his looks. Do you see that woman who has stopped to speak to them now? That is Mrs. Angelo, who wrote that wonderful book on Decorative Art—Oh! you haven’t read it. Then I needn’t offer to introduce you.”

“Thanks, no—but,” said the General diplomatically, “I should like to know the young painter with the Egyptian name, Mr. Pharaoh. You have interested me in him.”

Mrs. Damas beamed out all over her resolute face, like bright sunshine on a stern October morning. “Come with me—I shall be delighted to introduce you,” she said, falling into the trap at once. “I know you’ll like him—everybody does.” And then, like a brilliant streak of light in her flame-coloured gown, she went across the room and intimated to Mr. Pharaoh, with a look which signified that he was to be civil, that General Vandeleur had asked to be introduced to him.

Mr. Pharaoh was disgusted! Of course he was perfectly willing to know rich and important old gentlemen, who might, and possibly would, make them-

selves useful in buying his pictures ; but, just at that moment he had come to the conclusion that the best thing for him to do would be to get married to somebody whose tastes would be congenial to his own, and he had also come to the conclusion that the new painter, Ray Dudley, was the prettiest girl he had seen for a long time, and that she had just the head that he had so long been hungering and waiting for for a study of the great picture he was then painting, which was to outshine everything with which he had already startled the world, and to place his name among the great names of the century. Thus, swayed as he was by pleasure and profit, Mr. Pharaoh had just made up his mind to cultivate Ray Dudley's society with a view to ulterior arrangements which might be good for them both, and while the Army man was still waiting about for a chance of ousting him he did not want to have his attention taken from the object in hand, even for the sake of making himself pleasant to the rich old gentleman, who probably wanted or would want to buy his pictures. However, in a celebrity (a wise one, that is, who means to keep a clear head in all relations of life), the instinct of making himself agreeable is very strong, and he stood and patiently listened to the old General's twaddle about pictures in general and his own in particular, with as much courtesy and attention as if he had been the august Forty combined in his own well-preserved — well-mummified, if you will — old person.

"I think you bought Miss Dudley's Academy picture," he remarked, when the General had brought his observations to a close.

"Yes, I am happy to say I did," said the General,

who was burning to talk about his granddaughter and did not like to begin without a lead.

"I thought so. Well, sir, I must congratulate you in having secured a really fine picture. The drawing is magnificent, 'pon my word; there's a bit of foreshortening in the arm of the officer still fighting which is a master-piece—I should be proud to have done it, sir. And the colour is exquisite—exquisite."

"Yes—I thought so myself," said the General, highly pleased at having his judgment thus commended; for, of course, he had made up his mind to buy the picture without having the least idea of the identity of the painter—"though, of course, I bought the picture more for the subject than for its merit. And then I must tell you," he went on, with an odd mixture of humility and *hauteur* which amused the clever painter infinitely, "that Miss Dudley is my granddaughter."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed the younger man in genuine astonishment. "Well, I am surprised—and yet I don't know that I ought to be, for she's very like you to look at—very like. Then, how ever did she get her wonderful knowledge of detail and the general tone of Indian, or rather Eastern, scenery? I quite imagined that she had been out there."

"My granddaughter was born and brought up in India," the General answered. "I never saw her until she was grown-up—until a very short time ago, in fact."

"Ah! I thought so. But where did she get her knowledge of painting?"

"She was several years in Rome," said the General proudly.

"Ah! I see—I see," said Mr. Pharaoh, "I see!"

Meantime, Rachel had been left for a moment or so unworried by the crowd. "Do come and sit down," said Harrington.

"I want to stand up," said Rachel.

"But," he persisted eagerly, "if I was some artist-chap that you couldn't possibly take any interest in and I asked you to come and sit down, you'd go and do it—now wouldn't you?"

"I might," she admitted.

"Then you might come and sit down now for ten minutes with me," he urged, "or let me take you for a cup of coffee or something. Do, dear; I won't say one word to vex you—I'll be as polite and as distant as if I'd only just been introduced to you and I didn't care a brass farthing for you."

In spite of herself, Rachel could not help laughing, and Harrington took advantage of the smile to press his claim yet further. "Come," he said, in the old sweet imperative way which had always been so dangerous to her.

And Rachel took his arm and went.

He settled her on a comfortable lounge and brought her a glass of champagne and some delicate sandwiches, and having suitably provided for himself, he sat down beside her with the air of a man who was taking a well-earned rest.

"You know I'm going to leave the Service, Rachel," he said, when he had finished his glass of champagne.

"Are you really?" she cried, forgetting that she had set herself to take no further interest in him.

"Yes; I sent in my papers yesterday."

"But why? Oh, what a pity," she exclaimed.

"Yes, perhaps it is rather a pity," he returned;

"but I've done some pretty rough service, and I don't know that the game is altogether worth the candle. I should never care to spend my whole life at it, and the General seems to prefer that I should stop in London."

"I see," she said thoughtfully.

"What a strange thing that my godfather should turn out to be your grandfather," he said, after a pause.

"Yes, a very strange thing," she agreed.

"You know I consider that the old boy treated you very badly," he went on.

"He might have been kinder, that is true," she admitted.

"But it's better to forget and forgive mistakes of that kind, don't you think, Rachel?"

"Unquestionably," she answered.

"It's such bad form to keep up resentment because some one, who otherwise may be an uncommonly good sort of chap, once made an ass of himself—don't you think?"

"Yes," said Rachel rather doubtfully.

"And it isn't right—it's un-Christian—it's—it's positively heathenish," he went on, warming well to his subject as he pursued it. "Yes, by Jove! it's positively heathenish. Now when I ever make an ass of myself," he continued confidentially, "nobody knows it sooner than I do, and nobody is or ever could be more sorry for my idiocy than I generally am. And when that happens I never mince matters at all, either to myself or to anybody else, but I just eat humble pie at once, and plenty of it. Depend upon it, Rachel, if you are wrong and you know you're wrong, there's nothing in the wide world like owning up."

"Oh, nothing," said Rachel.

"Excepting a show of mercy on the other side," he suggested.

"Yes, it is a good thing for the other side to be merciful," Rachel admitted.

Harrington stretched himself and settled down still more comfortably on the wide lounge—he felt all at once that the day was his, that he had only to persevere a little and Rachel would forget all about the past in which he had made such an unmitigated ass of himself.

"I'm very glad that you feel like that, darling," he said easily. "Of course I know that you've been awfully angry with me, but you must know that I never meant to offend you or meant you quite to look at things in the way you did. It was only that my devotion to you was so great, so utter, that I could not, would not, run the risk of plunging you into dire poverty—you understand that, don't you, darling?"

"I think," said Rachel very quietly, "that I understand you perfectly—perfectly; better, perhaps, than anyone ever understood you before. You promised me, when we came in here, that you would be as polite and distant as if you had but just been introduced to me. Do you think, now, that this is quite the conversation I should have had with Mr. Pharaoh if he had brought me in here?"

"Who is Mr. Pharaoh?" he asked jealously. "The man you were talking to just now?"

"Yes. He is the painter, you know—the coming man—the man of the day for that matter," she answered.

"Ah! a painter-fellow—yes!" Harrington drawled. "But you couldn't possibly have had any conversation which would *interest* you with a chap like that."

"But he does interest me greatly," she exclaimed.

"Really? How very odd! Well, darling, I might almost feel jealous of this Mr. Pharaoh if I did not know that you had forgiven me everything—and you have, have you not? You will remember only my devotion and not my mistakes?"

"There was a man once who died," said Rachel quietly, "and went up and knocked at the door of Heaven.

"‘Hallo!’ said St. Peter, ‘what do you want?’

"‘I want to come in,’ said the man.

"‘What’s your qualification?’ asked St. Peter.

"‘I’ve been married,’ answered the man, not able to think of any other.

"‘Oh, come in, come in,’ said St. Peter (who was himself a married man), ‘that’s qualification enough for us.’

"Well, immediately behind there came another man, who had heard this conversation, and who saw the first man pass in.

"‘Well,’ said St. Peter, ‘and what do you want?’

"‘I want to come in,’ said the second man.

"‘Oh—and what’s your qualification?’

"‘Well, I’ve been married twice,’ said the man, feeling that he had an infinitely better chance than the last applicant.

"‘Oh, go away, go away,’ cried St. Peter, ‘you didn’t know when you were well off; we want no fools here,’ and promptly shut the door in the unfortunate’s face.”

"It’s a very funny story—I fancy I’ve heard it before,” said Harrington, genuinely puzzled. “But I don’t see why you should tell it to me, nor the application of it.”

"I saw it in my own mind," said Rachel demurely. "But perhaps it was unusually far-fetched and obscure; anyway, I'll not repeat it or explain it—the joke is not good enough."

She got up from the cosy lounge and went to speak to a lady just as it dawned upon Harrington that to most persons a man or woman who is caught twice in the same trap is a fool for whom there is no excuse and towards whom no mercy can be shown. He was in the act of rising to follow her when the thought flashed into his mind, and he sat down again with a suppressed groan, feeling as if he had come to another blind alley of his intercourse with Rachel Power.





CHAPTER XVIII.

MR. PHARAOH'S SUGGESTION.

"If you would fall into any extreme, let it be on the side of gentleness. The human mind is so constructed that it resists rigour and yields to softness."—ST. FRANCIS DE SALES.

"Shall I write to her? Shall I go?
Ask her to marry me by-and-bye?
Somebody said that she'd say—No;
Somebody knows that she'll say—Aye."
—TENNYSON.

A FEW weeks had gone by, the season was fast drawing near to its close and people were talking more about their plans for the autumn than of any other subject.

Valentine Harrington being now a free man, was all anxiety to find out something of Rachel's plans for spending the autumn; but Rachel was not an easy woman to get information from when she had made up her mind not to give it, and finally, he had to make use of the old General to find out what he was so particularly anxious to know.

Not that he asked the General in plain words to do him this service—Valentine Harrington seldom put his wishes into plain words at any time, and never on such an occasion as this. But he incited the General by careless inquiries as to whether he meant to ask his

granddaughter to the Priory during the autumn or not, and the General, straightway falling into the trap, made it his business to go at once to Rachel and lay his plans before her.

"Go to the Priory!" said Rachel, when she became aware of his wishes. "Oh, I'm very sorry, I'm sure—but the fact is, Mrs. Damas and I have made all our plans, and I don't quite see how we can manage even to put in a week anywhere else."

"But, my dear," said the old General reproachfully, "how could you dream of completing all your arrangements without first hearing what my plans were? You might have been sure that I should wish you to spend at least some part of the autumn with me."

"Yes, of course I might," returned Rachel very quietly; "but then you see, General Vandeleur, I have got out of the way of waiting to see what other people will or will not do."

The General winced under this home-thrust, the more so because he saw plainly that it was not intended as a home-thrust at all, but was merely a statement of fact. He had so long ago forgiven himself for his first reception of his granddaughter that he could hardly understand that she was not as proud of him as he was of her; and every now and again Rachel showed him this as plainly as unconsciously.

"But you could not imagine, my dear, that I should have a house-party at the Priory without you there," he said, the reproach giving way to positive ill-usage.

"I am afraid I am very stupid and ignorant," answered Rachel simply, "but I really do not know anything about the Priory—I never heard of it. Is it your country house?"

General Vandeleur looked, as he felt, just as if he was going to be very ill. Here was his own granddaughter, his nearest, his closest kith and kin, his heiress, and she actually did not know that he was Vandeleur of the Priory, Colchester. It was incredible—nay more, it was monstrous.

“You remember your mother?” he burst out.

“Oh, yes.”

“And she never told you about the Priory?”

“Not a word. My mother never mentioned you to me. All I knew when I came home—and it was very little—I learned from my father; but he never mentioned any Priory to me.”

“But do you mean to tell me that neither you nor Mrs. Damas have ever looked me out in the Red Book”—the old man almost shouted in his indignation and disgust.

Rachel went off into a gay fit of laughter.

“The Red Book!” she cried. “Why, I never even saw one—oh, yes! I’ve heard of it—but what do you think either Mrs. Damas or I can want to read one for? I have got a great name to make, which is not so easy a thing as you might fancy, and she has got a great name *to keep*, which is just about ten times harder to do—so what do we want to be worrying ourselves about the Red Books for? For my part I think ten thousand times more of the Academy Catalogue than I do of all the Red Books and peerages in the world.”

The General’s feeling of illness increased with every word his granddaughter uttered; he felt very much as a hen must feel when the young duckling she has hatched among her own brood all at once gets beyond her power and authority, and in spite of her loud cluckings of fear and the wild fluttering of her

feathers, suddenly takes to the water and swims away boldly and bravely whither she has neither the nerve nor the inclination to follow.

"Then what are you going to do this autumn?" he asked quite meekly, feeling that a show of authority would be useless since it would be but a sham.

"Mrs. Damas and I have taken rooms in a delightful old farm-house for three months," she answered, "close to the sea, in a lovely part of the country—in Cornwall, in fact. And there we are going to work, for several other painters have got rooms in the neighbourhood and we mean to form a sort of temporary guild for real hard work."

"Anybody I know amongst them?" the General asked with well-assumed carelessness.

"Yes, I think you know Mr. Pharaoh," Rachel answered.

"Oh!—yes, I've seen nim," said the General shortly and with a sniff that was almost a snort. "They say he is clever."

"He is more than ordinarily clever," said Rachel, mildly; "he is a genius. It is a great thing for a man of his age to have done such work as his. I am very proud of knowing him."

General Vandeleur gave a sniff of intense disgust—that his granddaughter should be proud of knowing "this painter-fellow," and actually arrange to pass her whole holiday, more or less in his company, was simply disgusting to him! He found himself wishing vehemently that he could be less proud than he was of having her for his granddaughter.

"Valentine will be greatly disappointed," he remarked after a minute or two.

Rachel went on working at a background vigorously, giving it, indeed, rapt attention; but she did not say anything, because about him she had nothing that she wished to say.

"He had counted so on your going to the Priory," the General went on, quite mournfully.

"What a strange thing that he never even told me there was such a place," said she sharply, resenting the fault-finding tone in which he spoke. "I'm sure he has been here often enough to tell me the whole of the Red Book from one end to the other."

General Vandeleur got up to go; her last sharp reply had just told him what he most wanted to know—or he thought so, which to him was the same thing.

"Well, my dear, I am very sorry that you thought fit to make your arrangements without in any way consulting or considering me. Perhaps it is my fault—I ought to have spoken to you sooner. At all events, I am very sorry."

"And so am I," said Rachel, touched in a moment by his tone. "But you see when you have made definite engagements, especially where work is involved too, you must keep to them. But perhaps if you care about having us, you could do with us after we get back from Cornwall."

"I never stop at the Priory in November," said the old General sadly. "It is a lovely place, but in November it would be death to me. I have not been there at that time of year for over twenty years. No, my dear, if it is a frosty Christmas I will make a party for you then, and you shall come and do the honours of the old place. But in November I dare not risk a day there."

"I am so sorry," said Rachel.

She could scarcely tell him that she had had an instinctive feeling that he would probably want her to spend some part of her holidays with him, and that she had caught eagerly at the suggestion held out to Mrs. Damas by Mr. Pharaoh for a three months' sojourn in Cornwall, because she did not want to find herself in the same house as Valentine Harrington—a quiet country house, wherein they would of necessity be thrown much together, and she would have no reasonable excuse for avoiding him. The General therefore, knowing nothing of this, went away feeling perfectly sure that Rachel had more than a liking for his godson, and that Val had not been keen enough about his wooing.

"Val, my dear lad," he said when he reached home and found Harrington waiting for him in the library, "I have good news for you, and bad. Rachel has made all her arrangements for going to Cornwall for three months with Mrs. Damas, and—and that painter fellow, Pharaoh, is going into the same neighbourhood also."

Valentine Harrington got up from his chair and said "Damn!" in a perfectly polite and conventional manner. "And which is the good news, sir?" he asked, when a moment had passed.

"The good news, my lad," cried the General, giving him a mighty slap on the shoulder, such as made the young man wince and the General's own old bones fairly rattle, "the good news is that our lady-bird is huffed—huffed with you, my lad."

"Yes, I know that," muttered Valentine ruefully, and he did to his cost, as he reminded himself—"but why? What makes you think so, sir?"

"She as good as told me that you had been there often enough to have spoken out long before this," cried the old man in high delight. "So go in at once, Val, and get the affair settled up, and then we can knock this Cornish expedition on the head without the least trouble."

"You think so, sir?" Val asked rather doubtfully

"I'm sure of it," returned the General promptly.—

"Don't waste any more time—go in and win, else you'll be having this Pharaoh man walking over the course, and where will you be then?"

"Very much out of it," admitted Valentine

"You see," said the General, "Rachel is just in that frame of mind when it takes but little to turn the scale one way or the other. Although she is so different to me in her ambitions and in most of her ways, Rachel is my own granddaughter in one respect—she is very proud, and damme, sir! I like her the better for it. I've wondered more times than once the last few weeks if it was really George Vandeleur who had quietly taken the facers I've had from that girl—regular facers, I tell you, and not a back-hander amongst 'em. And I like her the better for it. I treated the girl badly and she resents it. In spite of everything that I have done or can do, she resents it yet; and she'll hardly own me or have me at any price. But, damme, sir, if she'd sat quietly down and let me treat her how I liked, I shouldn't have liked her half as well. Ten to one I'd have just tried how badly I could behave to her, if only to find out how much she would bear. It's a way we men have, and if women only knew their power, they would let us see a good deal more of the devil in them than they do."



CHAPTER XIX.

PLAIN SPEAKING.

"A wise man reflects before he speaks; a fool speaks, and then reflects on what he has uttered."—DELILE.

"Never give way to an assailing enemy."—BACON.

THUS urged by his godfather, Valentine Harrington determined to shilly-shally no longer but to go in and speak plainly to Rachel all that was in his mind, and the next day being a Saturday, he made himself look very spruce and betook himself to South Kensington Square.

It was not a very auspicious day, for he found the usual crowd in the studio and Rachel sitting on the edge of the big platform on which Mrs. Damas's sitters stood or sat for their portraits, and beside her, quite close to her in fact, was the rising young painter, Mr. Pharaoh.

Not only were they sitting very near together, but they were evidently enjoying a thoroughly interesting and apparently confidential chat about something or other and, what was not very usual with her, Rachel was doing most of the talking, while Mr. Pharaoh, with all his soul in his eyes and a broad smile on his lips, was listening intently.

The worst of it was that as Valentine Harrington stood at the door watching them, he could not hide from himself the fact that this Mr. Pharaoh was not only great, but was also a very personable young man. He had not Harrington's stature to boast of, being under rather than over the middle height, nor had he his smart and soldierly gait and bearing; yet, for all that, he was a comely-looking young man, fair-haired and ruddy-skinned, with good bluish eyes and very good features; while over all there hung the expression and air of a man who was full of fire and intelligence, one who was conscious of having done good work and meant to do better. And how Valentine Harrington loathed him, him and his pictures, his name, his—his *everything*, pen of mine could hardly tell.

However, he could not stand there by the door glowering at Rachel, who by-the-bye had her back half turned towards him and had not, he thought, seen him come in; and he did not want to go and interrupt their talk just then. But, all the same, he moved a little away from the door and spoke to a man he knew who, like himself, was standing alone.

And whilst he was standing there, he saw Mrs. Damas turn her head sharply round with an unmistakable frown on her straight brows, just as Françoise announced "Major Pottinger." With the instinct of one army man's desire to look at another army man, Harrington turned to the door. "What a brute," was his mental comment.

Major Pottinger blundered into the room, a very big lopsided person, with straight yellowish hair and a very low forehead; with little pig's eyes and a huge

chin and jaw, a man all collars and cuffs and a great many rings, who went up to Mrs. Damas, looked all round the room, and said "Haw, haw!" shot his linen till the bystanders who did not know him, wondered if it was a new kind of conjuring entertainment, looked all round the room the other way, and said "H'er—H'er!" shot the linen of the other arm, and gracefully presented a hand in a new yellow glove to the hostess.

It was a wonderful performance, and Harrington watched it with a kind of disgusted awe, puzzled to know in what part of the Service such a man could have been long enough to have reached the rank of Major. Although he did not know it, that was a question which a good many people in and out of the Service asked of themselves and of one another, and it was a question which had never been satisfactorily answered.

That he was not a very welcome guest to the brilliant hostess, Harrington saw plainly enough from the limp hand she gave him and the way in which she looked from side to side, anywhere, except at his flat face with its little sly twinkling eyes. Then she seemed to make some excuse for leaving him, for he bowed and shot out his cuffs till his hands almost disappeared from sight, and Mrs. Damas flitted away to another part of the studio.

Harrington watched with some curiosity to see what the gallant Major would do next, and to his intense disgust he saw him, after glaring round, shoot out his cuffs again and swagger across to where Rachel was still sitting. He fancied that Rachel had seen the big burly lumbering figure go across the studio, for, as he approached her, she turned still further away from the

general company and nearer to Mr. Pharaoh, and seemed to be entirely engrossed in a conversation so interesting that she had neither eyes nor ears for anybody else. And he fancied too, from the laughter in the painter's blue eyes and his air of suppressed mirth, that he perhaps had warned her not to look round. Major Pottinger, however, was not a man to be daunted by any show of distaste on the part of the lady on whom he thought fit to bestow his pestilential attentions. He stopped in front of her, struck an attitude, with one leg well out before him, and shot out his cuffs again.

"Haw—h'er ! HOW-d'you-DO, Miss Dudley ?—haw—haw !" he remarked, holding out the yellow hand to her.

Rachel looked up with an air of surprise.

"Oh, thank you," she said frigidly ; "I am quite well."

"Delighted, I'm sure," said the Major in a very loud voice.

For a moment he waited with the yellow hand still outstretched for Rachel to lay her's in it. Rachel, however, kept hers still clasped within the other and had evidently no intention of moving them so much as a single hair's breadth, so at last the Major flourished his cuff out again and began to tug at his moustache.

"Delighted, I'm sure, to have the pleasure of meeting you again," he began, still in the storm-at-sea sort of voice.

"I don't think," said Rachel coldly, "that I ever had the honour of speaking to you before."

"Oh, yes—yes. We met here one day early in the season. You are Miss Dudley—I am quite sure of it, because it was the day before I went off to Viennah—haw ! I—er—go a great deal to Viennah—and Berlin—haw ! Yes—yes—yes !"

"I remember you being here perfectly well," said Rachel in an exasperatingly civil voice, "but you were never introduced to me—that I am *quite* sure of."

"Surely," she thought—and *looked*—"that will have the desired effect."

But no; the Major spread himself out into an attitude of affable explanation. "Ah—er—excuse me, I remember it perfectly. Lady Bardinge did me the honour——"

"But she couldn't. I don't know her," interrupted Rachel, who had had so many denunciations of this man hurled at her that she began to get desperate in her efforts to be rid of him.

"No—haw! Yes—you are right. It was the Duchess of Pimlico—I remember perfectly."

Now Rachel did not know the Duchess of Pimlico any more intimately than she knew my Lady Bardinge, but she was prevented from saying so by the scrape of a violin, which proclaimed that somebody was going to play upon that instrument.

With a sigh of relief Rachel turned her eyes whence the sound came, and encountered Harrington's gaze. She smiled instantly, a smile so friendly and so informal that hope went up high at once and he felt all in a moment fully satisfied with himself and the whole world, —even with this blatant and boring Major Pottinger. As they were but just behind the piano or, more correctly, to one side of it, the irrepressible Major was compelled to step a little aside so as to allow Rachel to have a view of the player, who was just then the rage in London—one Flip van Oosterzee, a young man from the Low Countries, who charmed almost as many people by his good-natured dark face and frank genial manners

as he did by his violin, a genuine Strad', of which he was a master.

To get from between Rachel and Flip Van Oosterzee, who stood sideways to them, Major Pottinger squeezed himself in front of the man to whom Harrington had been talking and put himself into an attitude calculated to attract her attention ; and then the music began.

How shall I describe it? A dreamy tender melody in a minor key—so dreamy, so tender, so soft, that you might have heard a pin drop in the crowded room. Even Harrington forgot his doubts and fears as he listened, and the gallant Major tugged fiercely at his moustache and tried to look as if he understood it. From the tender melody the music rose louder and louder, swelling higher and higher until the listening crowd began to wonder how one man's hands could draw such enchanted sounds from even a genuine Strad'—then all at once the Major created a diversion, or at least a sensation, by suddenly shooting out first one cuff and then another, contriving to hit Van Oosterzee on the elbow and to send his bow flying over the strings with a force that made him jump a couple of feet away from where he stood. However, with the instinct of a great artist or a true gentleman, or both, the violinist picked up the tender melody again and went on as much as if nothing had happened as was possible.

Rachel flung an indignant glance at Harrington, and the Major, without having uttered a word of apology or regret, took to tugging at his moustache and nodding his head at his own thoughts as if he had done something remarkably clever. Already Harrington's hot blood was boiling, and that look of Rachel's did not tend to lower it.

"Tell that chap to get out of the way," he said to the man in front of him.

"Don't like to," answered the man in a whisper.

"Pull him out of the road," persisted Harrington. "If you don't, I swear I'll kick him out of the house."

Thus incited, the more timid man touched the Major on the shoulder—"I am asked to tell you," he said civilly, "that Mr. Van Oosterzee likes to have more room"—in the face of which Major Pottinger had no choice but remove himself a yard or so away.

"I'm awfully obliged to you," said Harrington presently, when the tender melody had come to an end. "I didn't want to tell the fellow myself, because I was in a devil of a temper and it might have got the better of me. But I've no notion of seeing a great artist treated in that way—no notion at all."

"Oh, no—but the fellow's just capable of making a row," said the man who had proved himself such an excellent cat's-paw.

"Oh, I should think so. By-the-bye, what regiment was he in? Do you know?"

"Haven't the least idea—nobody was ever able to find out," said the man with a laugh.

Harrington laughed too and went to speak to Rachel, but just as he moved Major Pottinger pushed himself past him and bent down to speak to her also.

"Haw—by-the-way, Miss Dudley," he began, shooting out his left cuff and holding a pencil over it, "I don't quite remember what you said your day at home was?"

"I have not a day at home," said Rachel getting up from her low seat.

"Haw—then I suppose I may call any time—er!

Ah! yes. Lady Cottersham promised to drive me down to call on you one day soon but——”

“But I don’t happen to know Lady Cottersham,” put in Rachel quickly.

“Oh, yes—she told me she knew you well,” explained the Major blandly. And—er—*what* did you say your address was?”

“I did not say anything about it,” said Rachel curtly.

“Miss Dudley, may I take you to have some tea?” broke in Harrington at that moment—and Rachel, with a sigh of intense relief, said, “Oh, yes, please do,” and took his arm.

“The brute!” he burst out as they reached the entrance hall. “Such men as that ought to be put out of every house they force themselves into.”

“I believe he is, every now and then,” she answered. “Ever since I have been going out it has been Mrs. Damas’s one cry—“Whatever you do, *don’t* let that Major Pottinger get hold of you.”

“How did Mrs. Damas manage to——”

“Be got hold of,” finished Rachel with a laugh. “Oh, somebody brought him one day, and she has never been really rid of him since. Oh, what a relief this is,”—and she sank down upon a comfortable lounge and closed her eyes wearily.

And in the studio at that moment, the Major was thinking about Miss Dudley’s strange way of bringing a conversation to an end.

“Queer thing, these celebrities are all alike. No *lady* ever behaves in that way; but these celebrities are all so ghastly common—they’ve got no sort of manners at all.”

Meantime, Harrington had got this particular celebrity a cup of tea and a sponge biscuit, and settled himself beside her on the sofa to enjoy the golden moment which had been so difficult to find.

"My darling," he said, in his low and tender voice, "I hate to see you at the mercy of a brute like that. Dearest, give me the right to protect you from all the world, and I will take care you are never annoyed in that way again."

"What do you mean?" said she, looking at him with startled eyes. "I don't——"

"I mean that I want you to be my wife, darling—no, don't look at me like that. It is the dearest wish of your grandfather's heart, Rachel—he is almost as anxious for it as I am."

For a moment Rachel sat silent, biting her lip—then she made a movement as if to put her cup down, and Harrington took it from her and put it on a table at hand. "Have you nothing to say to me, dearest?" he asked in his tender voice.

For a moment Rachel wavered—a vision of a life's love came before her dazzled eyes, she was on the point of saying that which he wished her to say, when another vision floated through her brain—a vision which brought back with the faithfulness of a photograph, the memory of a dreadful day, when they had stood together in a sitting-room at Morley's Hotel and he had broken to her that he did not mean to risk his future wealth and comfort by marrying her, when he had broken to her a proposal of another kind.

"No, I have nothing to say," she said, with a great effort to be calm and collected, to keep her wits about her, in fact—"I have nothing to say. I am very sorry

you have spoken about this again. I thought that you understood I said everything that I had to say months ago."

"Rachel!" he cried hoarsely, "do you mean that your grandfather's wishes have no weight with you?"

"What has my grandfather done for me to make them of weight?" she asked very scornfully.

"But is it all over? Do you really reject me?" he persisted.

"Yes," she answered, very sadly; "it was all over then—you killed it."

"Not your love! I'll swear that you love me still," he cried.

"Not my love—no. I don't know when that will die," she answered, "perhaps never. Not my love, but my trust—my faith."

"And to-day you finally reject me?" he urged, hoping to make the hard words too hard for her to say.

"I have nothing else to say," she said in a low voice, and turning went out of the room and straight up the stairs into her own bed-chamber, where she shut herself in alone.





CHAPTER XX.

A LITTLE SUPPER.

"The roses of pleasure seldom last long enough to adorn the brow of him who plucks them; and they retain not their sweetness after they have lost their beauty."—BLAIR.

"To fret is only to sow the wind, and that is a seed that will not produce a good crop by itself."—PAXTON HOOD.

A FEW minutes after Rachel had gone upstairs, General Vandeleur made his appearance in the studio. He looked round for his granddaughter, but could not see her. He did, however, see the valiant Major Pottinger elaborately explaining to Mrs. Van Hyphen that his dear friend, the Duchess of Pimlico, had been accused not long before, in a Society paper, of having taken to painting her face, and how as a proof of her innocence of any such villainous procedure, she had actually sent for her maid, and had told her to bring her a sponge and towel, and she had washed her face in his presence.

In unutterable disgust the General stood to listen, filled, if the truth be told, with admiration for the clever way in which Mrs. Van Hyphen ignored his blunder.

"Really," she said, with admirable carelessness; "and was anybody else there?"

"No, not a soul, 'pon my word—haw—h'er!" he answered.

"The Duchess paid you a very high compliment," said Mrs. Van Hyphen, languidly. "I should hear of a

good many newspaper paragraphs before I should take so much trouble for you."

"Oh, the Duchess is very fond of me; she goes a good deal by my opinion," bawled the Major. "She's a very dear friend of mine."

Mrs. Van Hyphen leaned back in her chair and fanned herself indifferently. It was a tall high-backed chair of carved oak and was known as "the throne" among Mrs. Damas's friends. The Major struck an attitude of elegant ease combined with the necessity, always present with him, of completing certain arrangements connected with his toilet, shooting his linen, and tugging at his moustache, till the bystanders wondered whether the cuffs would wear out, or the straggling moustache be dragged forth by the roots first.

Behind "the throne" stood Mr. Pharaoh, enjoying himself immensely, and as the General drew near to him, he muttered in a tolerably audible voice, "H'm—Tom Fool knows a good many more people than know Tom Fool," at which General Vandeleur laughed outright and Mrs. Van Hyphen got up in haste to go. Somehow or other Mrs. Van Hyphen always betook herself away when anything especially funny was said. Why? Oh, how can I presume to say, dear Reader? For reasons probably best known to herself.

"Good-bye, dear Mrs. Damas," she said. "Yes, I must go really," and then she added something about a delightful hour and a dinner party the other side of the park.

"Haw—yes—yes—must go, thanks, Mrs. Damas," shouted the redoubtable Major. "Dining out, you know. Been so long in Viennah and Berlin, everybody is asking me to dinner—haw—haw!" and away

he dashed after the unhappy Mrs. Van Hyphen, who was bustling away to her carriage with an energy which was the outcome of positive desperation.

There was quite a rush out of the studio into the drawing-room to see which of them would win—that is whether Mrs. Van Hyphen would manage to get in and shut the door before he had sorted his hat out from among the rest of the hats still left in the entrance.

“By Jove, she’s done it,” exclaimed Pharaoh as Mrs. Van Hyphen shut the door with a bang, and the carriage rolled away just as Major Pottinger reached the pavement and stood breathless and disappointed looking after it.

“Francine,” cried Mrs. Damas in a sharp whisper to the Frenchwoman who was doing something at the tea-table, “go and shut the front door.”

“Certainly, Madame,” said Francine, who understood perfectly.

“’Pon my word, that’s a clever woman,” remarked Mr. Pharaoh to the company generally—and then he added reflectively, “I’d like to paint her portrait—I never saw anything more cleverly done in my life than that.”

Half-a-dozen of the people nearest to him burst out laughing at the idea, and under cover of their fun and chattering, the General edged up to Harrington and asked him a question.

“Where is Rachel?” he said.

“She was here a moment or so ago,” answered Harrington, with well-assumed carelessness.

“Have you been talking to her at all?”

“Oh, yes. I think she went upstairs just now,” said Harrington, putting a good face on the matter.

"I see," said the old man, then turned round to Mrs. Damas, who touched him on the arm. "Pardon me—I did not hear."

"Will you stop and have supper with us?" she said pleasantly. "Quite informally you know, but I shall be charmed if you will."

"I shall be delighted," said the old General gallantly.

"And Mr. Harrington?" said Mrs. Damas, looking past him at Valentine.

Now Harrington, after the blow Rachel had dealt him by refusing to marry him, would fain have got out of accepting the invitation if he could. He hummed and ah'd and stammered, until at last the General took the matter out of his hands entirely by answering for him.

"Of course you can, my dear lad," he said testily. "You cannot be engaged, for you were going to dine quietly with me to-night. What? Oh, Mrs. Damas would not ask you if she did not want you. He will be delighted Mrs. Damas, delighted! And, by the bye, Val, my dear lad," he went on, not giving Harrington time to utter a single word, "just go out and tell Jervis to go back and let them know at Portland Place that we are not coming back to dinner, and he need not come back for us—we'll take a cab home."

"Very well, sir," said Harrington, resigning himself to his fate.

He went out obediently, feeling that it really was fate. He had tried, honestly tried, to leave, according to to Rachel's evident desire, but fate, in the persons of Mrs. Damas and his godfather, had been too strong for him and he had not been given free choice in the matter. So he went out and sent his godfather's carriage home with the message for Jones that they were not coming

back to dinner. And then he went back into the house feeling more at ease and light of heart, for it was just possible that he might catch Rachel's heart in the rebound from her anger, and that after all everything might at last come right.

But that hope died almost at its birth, for at half-past seven Rachel came down again, in obedience to a summons from Mrs. Damas, and the blank look of consternation which swept across her face when she saw him among those who were remaining to supper was enough in itself to kill any new and tender hope that might have been born that evening in his heart. But, nevertheless, he did not submit to leaving her in ignorance of his effort not to intrude upon her further.

"Rachel," he said simply, going straight up to her and speaking in a voice that could reach no ear but hers, "after what you said to me just now, I hope you don't think me such a brute as to force myself upon your company. I assure you I tried hard to get away, but I was engaged to dine with the General to-night and he simply put me in a hole by accepting for himself and me too. I couldn't help myself. Under any other circumstances in the world I would not have stopped."

Rachel bit her lip and turned her face towards him—when he saw that she was much paler than usual.

"Never mind," she said, with an effort—"it does not hurt me to have you stop."

"I know that you would be more comfortable if I didn't," he went on, vexedly. "But without giving you away to everybody here, what excuse could I make?"

"None," she said. The instinct of hospitality was very strong in her; she felt that it was precisely as he

had said, that he had been regularly trapped into accepting Mrs. Damas's invitation, and she was for the moment more sorry for his discomfort than she was conscious of her own pain.

"Don't speak like that about it," she said, with a ghost of a smile. "You must know that you are not loathesome to me."

Under cover of a screen which half hid them from view, Harrington caught her hand in a fierce grip.

"On the contrary," said Rachel, with a sharp sob catching her breath—"your presence is always a pleasure to me, even though—though I wish that it were not so."

Harrington dropped her hand instantly—and the tender flower of hope which had sprung up anew within his heart, withered and died.

There were not above a dozen staying to supper, and Rachel found herself put between Harrington and Mr. Pharaoh.

Mr. Pharaoh, indeed, took care that he got next to her, and as Mrs. Damas quite unsuspectingly said—"Mr. Harrington, will you take Miss Dudley?" Valentine had no choice but to be on the other side.

And he was very unhappy; for even after what Rachel had said to him that afternoon and when she found he was remaining to supper, if she had shown some signs of annoyance at his near presence to her, if she had talked more to Mr. Pharaoh than to him, he would even yet have had some hope. But although Mr. Pharaoh tried very hard to monopolise her attention and her conversation, and gave her every excuse for utterly neglecting Harrington, Rachel never attempted to do so. She talked to him calmly and

quietly—and by what an effort God and herself only knew ; Harrington never—as if he had been some unusually important guest whom it was her duty to entertain. She talked of theatres and plays, of Irving's *Robert Macaire* and Ellen Terry's *Ellaline* ; she talked about the difference between Beerbohm Tree in the *Pompadour* and Beerbohm Tree as *Gringoire* ; then she wandered on to the pictures and the exhibitions, and at last they got on to politics, and gravely and seriously they discussed the domestic virtues of Mr. Gladstone, while their hearts were breaking ! And then, when they all adjourned to the studio and cigarettes were the order of the day, they fell apart and made talk no more, nor even spoke to each other until Harrington went to bid her good-night ; good-night and good-bye.

“ Something has happened,” said the General as they turned the corner of the square.

“ Yes,” said Harrington quietly.

“ Well ?” eagerly. “ Well, my dear lad, is it all right ?”

“ I'm afraid not, sir,” said Harrington, biting his lip and trying hard to seem cool and unconcerned. “ Miss Power refused me definitely this afternoon.”

“ *What ?*” said the General, scarcely believing his own ears.

“ You were rather out of it, sir, in accepting for me,” Harrington went on. “ Of course you did not know, but you were a little out of it. It made it awkward for us both—for she had just refused me when you arrived.”

General Vandeleur sat back in the cab and looked hard at his godson by the light of the flickering little lamp.

“ Rachel has refused you !” he said incredulously.

“ Yes, refused me,” answered Harrington unsteadily.

"My dear lad, you must have bungled the matter somehow," he persisted.

"I am afraid that is so, sir," Harrington admitted.

"I could swear the girl likes you," cried the General vexedly.

So could Harrington, but he could hardly, under the circumstances, say so. There was a moment's awkward pause—then with a shrug of his shoulders, and an air of indifference which he was far from feeling, he answered, "Well, sir, I thought so too—but, of course, the lady knows best about it; and I think, if you don't mind, I'll get out here and go home. This is my nearest point. To tell you the truth, this kind of thing is rather a new sensation to me, and I don't much like it. I want to be alone to think over it a bit."

"All right—good night, my dear lad," returned the General.

Valentine thrust the trap door open with his stick. "Here, let me out, cabby?" he said.

He got out, with a "good night" to the General as he did so; and the old man leant forward just as Harrington reached the ground.

"I daresay it will all come right, Val," he said, soothingly. "Such matters often do. Anyway, *you* shall not be the one to suffer by it."

"Don't say that, sir," he answered—then stepped back and signed to the cabman to drive on.

"I shall always have to suffer for it," he said out aloud to the summer night—and then he gave a great sigh and turned away towards his chambers (for when he left the Service the General had insisted on his setting up rooms of his own, that he might be perfectly independent)

Meantime the General was fast spinning towards Portland Place, and he was in what his servant Jones invariably described as "a boiling passion."

"Upon my soul," he exclaimed to the soft night air, "if I find the hussy has been playing fast and loose with him, and making an ass of me—I'll—I'll cut her off with a shilling, and—and, by George, he shall marry the other one!"





CHAPTER XXI.

THE WISDOM OF AGE.

“Be sure that nothing destroyeth authority so much as the unequal and untimely interchange of power carried too far, and relaxed too much.”—BACON.

“While there’s life there’s hope, and hope is by the nature of it intent on to-morrow.”—FRANCIS LACOX.

AT this time, partly for the sake of practice and partly because she did not feel equal to starting another picture, Rachel was occupied in painting a portrait of herself. And although she had at first intended only to make a mere sketch, with the idea of giving it to Mrs. Damas to set in a corner of the big studio, no sooner did she find herself fairly at work than her instinct of thoroughness began to assert itself, and, before she knew what she was about, she had the vision of a carefully-finished picture in her mind.

At this time it was rapidly approaching completion—a full-length figure of herself in a soft white silken gown, without relief of any kind, except her great gray eyes and fair hair showing up well against a curtain of crimson plush.

When General Vandeleur, about twelve o’clock the next day, was shown into the studio, Rachel was there, working alone, Mrs. Damas having just gone out on important business. She looked up as he entered and put down her palette and brushes, and looked critically at her hand before she held it out to him.

"It is quite clean," she said, with a desperate effort to be cheerful. "You know, General Vandeleur, we are not supposed to receive visitors during working hours. You are the only one for whom Mrs. Damas relaxes a very rigid rule."

The old man took her hand in his and held it there in a close grasp, while his fierce angry old eyes scanned her face keenly.

"Rachel!" he said—"I have come to know what it all means."

"I—I don't understand you," she stammered, trying to draw her hand away from his.

"Oh, yes, I think you do," he said quietly, very quietly considering the horrible temper he had been in since the previous night. "Why did you send my dear lad away as you did yesterday?"

"Did he—did he—," and then she stopped short and stood looking at him, asking him a question plainly with her great lovely eyes.

"Yes, he told me about it," the old man said simply. "I asked him."

"And he told you—what?" She was afraid, from her grandfather's manner, that Harrington had been led into making a clean breast of everything—of telling him exactly why she had rejected him.

"He told me that you refused him definitely."

Rachel breathed freely again; the General mistook the long breath for a sigh. It was like a good many other mistakes that the old man had made during the course of his not uneventful life.

"And I want to know," he went on, "*why* you refused him?"

"I cannot tell you that," she answered quickly

"You cannot tell me," incredulously—"and why not?"

"I did refuse him—that is enough," she answered, with dignity.

"It is not enough for me," returned the General in a voice which, as Jones could have warned her, betokened that his patience was fast leaving him. "It is my right to hear your reason, and I insist upon hearing it."

Rachel's desire to soften the pain she had given him faded away, and she seemed to freeze instantly.

"I question your right, sir," she said, stepping back from where she stood. "You can have no possible right over my private affairs—they concern me, and me alone. Even if you had been the grandfather which you have *not* been to me, you would still have no *right* to ask me such a question, or to insist upon an answer which I am not willing to give. I say to you that I have declined the honour which Mr. Harrington has offered me, and I have no more to say about it."

By this the old man knew that it was useless to try to scold or frighten her into submission, so he tried another way of getting the information he wanted.

"Rachel," he said, "will you look me in the face and tell me that you have not done this thing because you knew that I wished it?"

"But why should I do so?" she cried in amazement.

"Because, as you truly said just now, I have not been the grandfather to you that I might have been."

"Upon my sacred word of honour," said Rachel, holding out her hand to him at once, "such an unworthy thought never entered my mind for a moment."

The old General bent down and kissed her hand tenderly.

"My dear," he said persuasively, "I want you to marry my dear lad."

"I'm very sorry," she murmured, shaking her head resolutely.

"If I did not feel sure that you like him—that you like him more than any other man you know, my dear—I should neither wish it nor ask it. But I know that you do."

Rachel said nothing, because on that subject she had nothing to say; but she shook her head again as resolutely as before.

"If you will tell me that you don't like him," the old man urged, "I'll never speak of the matter to you again."

"I cannot tell you that," said Rachel, suddenly raising her eyes and looking straight at him, "but I am not going to marry him, so whether I like him or not is a matter of no moment."

For an instant General Vandeleur was strongly tempted to go off into a fit of rage; to exclaim that if she did not do his bidding, and fall in with his wishes, he would not only never see her again but he would also disinherit her! However, the certainty of the knowledge that she would quietly acquiesce in such a decision and also would probably never trouble herself even to think about him again, kept him from this and made him calm; and the fact of his keeping calm made him better able to argue his case with her.

"He is such a dear lad, Rachel," he said mournfully, "so generous and so manly; and he is kind-hearted and good, too, my dear—why, Rachel—Rachel—is it that there is someone else?" he burst out, as a new and unwelcome thought flashed upon him.

"Nobody else," answered Rachel, so promptly that he dismissed the thought at once.

"He is heart-broken," he went on.

Rachel began to be terribly afraid that if he went on much longer she would not be able to keep the tears out of her eyes.

The old man saw that she was trembling, and fancied that she was wavering—"It will be the ruin of his life," he urged, "and—although I don't expect that to have much weight with you—it is the dearest wish of my heart."

"You make it very hard for me," she broke out at last.

"I want to make it hard for you, my dear," he said, eagerly; "I want to make it so hard that you will do what I wish and what my poor lad asks. I brought him up, Rachel, and though you are my own granddaughter and he is no——"

"I know all that you are going to say," she cried, glad to seize the chance of speaking plainly—"I know. You mean, by-and-bye—after a very long time, I hope—he is to be your heir. You think that I am your own granddaughter and he is no relation to you, and that it is all his by right. So it is. Please don't leave me a penny, I don't want it. I am happier, far, far happier, working for myself. It is good for me to do it. But don't hesitate to leave Val everything—I would infinitely rather that he had it than I."

She grew quite excited as she spoke, and laid her pretty slender hands persuasively upon his arm. He stood looking down upon her with a puzzled expression.

"My dear," he said after a moment, "shall I tell you something?"

"Yes."

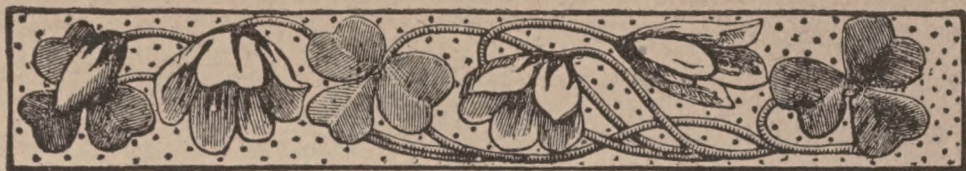
"I don't know what is working in your mind, or whether Val has offended you or not, but *you love him?* Yes, with all your heart and soul! I am sure of it."

Rachel let her hands fall from his arm and then stood looking at him for a moment or so; and then she suddenly dismayed him utterly by running back to the large couch in the corner, flinging herself down among the cushions in an agony of tears.

In spite of his being by nature and habit alike an autocrat and a martinet, the old General's first impulse was a gallant one, and he moved a step towards her as if to try to comfort her. Then he stopped short and stood looking at her for a moment, shaking his head.

"Better leave her for a bit—she will cry till that crank in her mind against marrying him gets fairly washed out of it," he thought; and then he went softly out of the studio, and closed the door gently behind him.





CHAPTER XXII.

THE WISDOM OF YOUTH.

"True love can no more be diminished by showers of evil-hap than flowers are marred by timely rain."—SIR PHILIP SIDNEY.

THE General drove straight along the Cromwell Road to Valentine Harrington's chambers in Curzon Street; but his godson was not at home.

General Vandeleur bent over the side of his phaeton and asked when Mr. Harrington was expected back. The respectable ex-butler who let out that particular house to unmarried gentlemen for a consideration replied that he did not know—Mr. Harrington had breakfasted that morning at his chambers, had dressed early, and had gone out saying that he should probably lunch at his club. Beyond this remark the ex-butler did not remember that Mr. Harrington had said anything.

The General hum'd and ah'd, and snorted with vexation, but he could not very well swear at the respectable person then standing on the pavement, so he had to content himself by scribbling an urgent message on a card, and requesting the respectable person not to lose an instant's delay in giving it to Mr. Harrington when he returned to his chambers.

"Certainly, sir—I will attend to it myself," the respectable person said with a profound bow. He had an admirable manner, but the bow was rather too profound

for the General's irritated nerves, and he felt that it would be the greatest relief in the whole world to get down and kick him soundly. That, however, was impossible—even General Vandeleur had to have some sort of an excuse for kicking a man, and just then he did not happen to have one of any kind. So, as a sort of apology to himself for having the feeling, he lifted his right elbow about an inch and turned the horses sharply round.

"I've a good mind to run home and see if he has been round," he thought.

No sooner thought than done; in a few minutes he was at his own door, but Mr. Harrington had not shown himself there that morning.

"If he comes," he said to Jones, "tell him I shall be in to lunch, and that he is to wait for me. I want to see him particularly—say on most important business"

"Very good, sir," returned Jones solemnly.

General Vandeleur after that drove round to his godson's club and left another card, bearing an urgent message there also, as he did not find Valentine himself. If he had only known it at that moment Harrington was sitting under the trees in the Park trying to console himself for the blow which had fallen upon him the previous day by chatting—flirting if you will—with Lady Bardinge's little pert-nosed, red-haired daughter. It was but poor consolation; yet, as all the world knows, any consolation is better than none, and Harrington was very miserable.

He had not meant to go out into society that day; he told himself that he was heartily sick of it, and that he should wire at once to Ellingham and go out by the midnight boat to Rotterdam and on to Norway to join

him in that salmon river of which he had drawn such tempting pictures. Yes, he would leave London that very day.

But, somehow, while he was just trying to dazzle himself with the delights of Norwegian salmon-fishing, he happened, by way of preventing anyone coming to talk to him, to pick up a book which was lying on the table close beside him—a volume of Thackeray; and while seeming to read and in reality thinking, his eyes fell upon these words, and his attention was attracted—

“The world is a looking-glass, and gives back to every man the reflection of his own face. Frown on it, and it will in turn look sourly on you; laugh at it and with it, and it is a jolly kind companion.”

He read the lines over two or three times, then he glanced round the luxurious room, looked out at the brilliant sunshine streaming over the thronged and busy street, and finally threw the book back on the table and got up from his chair.

“After all,” he said to himself, “Rachel Power is not the only woman in the world, and if she were, that’s no reason why I should make myself wretched because she’s as hard as a flint and as unbending as steel. No, by Jove! that it is not. I’ll go out and look round the Park, and by Jove! I’ll see if there isn’t some balm left in Gilead after all.”

No sooner said than done. He sauntered up Pall Mall and into St. James’ Street, stopped at a flower shop in Piccadilly and bought himself a gardenia for his coat, and finally arrived in the Park just as Lady Barding entered into an animated conversation with a friend in the shape of a stately old dowager, and little Miss Dulcie, in a white frock all frills and

embroidery fresh and clean, plentifully decked with pale green ribbons, was looking forlornly round in the hope of seeing somebody who would make the morning pleasant; and forthwith Harrington sat down beside the young lady, and they simultaneously set to work with such vigour to make things pleasant for one another that it was quite a beautiful sight to see them.

But no paradise lasts long without its serpent. Nor did theirs! Before Harrington had been sitting there a quarter-of-an-hour, the ungainly figure of one Major Pottinger loomed in the distance, alone and advancing with that peculiar gait which in a wild beast is called "prowling." "Oh, here's that horrid Major Pottinger," cried little Miss Dulcie, in quite a scared tone.

Lady Bardinge's eagle eye had, however, already discerned the enemy. "Mr. Harrington," she said, authoritatively and yet with a pleading ring which fairly touched Valentine, "do me a favour. Take my daughter to see the flowers, the horses—anything to——" she broke off short and looked at him, and Harrington hastened to let her see that he understood.

"Certainly, Lady Bardinge; I shall be charmed," he said, getting up from his chair at once. "Shall we go this way?" he added to Dulcie.

"Oh, yes," said she, starting off at a good brisk pace. "Anywhere to get out of that dreadful man's way. Do you know he really frightens me? Yes, really. If it were not for Mamma—but Mamma always knows what to do."

"That's a very good thing for you; the fellow's an awful brute," answered Harrington. "But we're all right now."

It was quite true—Lady Bardinge was usually equal to any emergency. She was in this case.

It happened that the redoubtable Major Pottinger was possessed also of an eagle eye, in common with her ladyship, and when he descried little Miss Dulcie, whom he was by way of admiring, he quickened his pace and began to crowd on all sail—that is to say, he brought well to the front all his attractions of clean *lingerie* and new gloves. Then when he saw the lady turn off with her cavalier, and go hastily in the direction of the Ride, he quickened his pace yet more and fairly gave chase.

But her ladyship was one too many for him. She was a person of commanding presence, with a prominent nose, a receding chin, a large bust, and that kind of high-pitched yet mellow voice which betokens familiar intercourse with the highest society. And when Major Pottinger got within a couple of yards of where she sat, she put out an exceedingly long parasol and stopped him. “How do you do, Major Pottinger?” she said in such bland and gracious tones that the Major immediately made a display of purple and fine linen such as would not have ill become a blushing school-girl or the window of a baby-linen shop—“I have not seen you for a long time.”

It was true enough. She might have seen him many a time if she would, but it did not just then suit her purpose to say so.

“H’er—h’er,” stammered the Major. “The fact is I’ve been a good deal in Viennah lately—I haven’t had time to look my friends up yet. H’er—h’er—but I shall be delighted to come and pay my respects to you,”—and here the linen came to the front again, as if silently assuring Lady Bardinge that it was of the most imma-

culate description and quite worthy of being invited to her house. "Haw—h'er—what day did you say you were at home, Lady Bardinge?"

"I did not say I was at home any day," said Lady Bardinge blandly. "I had my last reception a month ago, and we go to our place in the country the day after to-morrow. Next season? Oh, I never make engagements or promises from one season to another. We may all be dead before then. Must you go? Ah!—good-bye—a pleasant autumn to you."

"Yes," she went on, as the Major lumbered off, "he is a dreadful person, but I think I gave them time to get away."

So effectually did they get away that Harrington went home with them to lunch and then to a friendly dinner at the Welcome Club, and finally reached his chambers just before midnight, when, with a solemn face, the respectable ex-butler handed him General Vandeleur's card bearing this urgent message—

"Important news. Come to me at once."





CHAPTER XXIII.

THE HARVEST.

"The old wound, if stricken, is the sorest ;
The old hope is hardest to be lost."

—ELIZABETH BARRATT BROWNING.

"**R**ACHEL, my child," said Mrs. Damas the next morning as they sat at breakfast, "you look very pale."

That was not wonderful, considering that Rachel had not closed an eye during the long hot night—but she said nothing about it, only that she had rather a headache.

"Take my advice," said Mrs. Damas briskly, "keep yourself quiet this morning, and simply do nothing."

"Oh, I cannot shirk the class," returned Rachel, who had made herself of great use to her friend, who had just started an outside studio, to her own comfort and that of everyone else in the house in South Kensington Square.

"Let the class take care of itself," cried Mrs. Damas with a pleasant laugh. "Surely you've not got such a high and mighty opinion of yourself as to think we can't scramble on without you."

"Well, I hardly thought that," Rachel replied, laughing also ; "only, as you know, Dorothy, I hate giving in."

"So do I," said Mrs. Damas heartily ; "but it's best not to fight against a headache, which is only another name for loss of nerve-power."

Punctually to her time for being at her studio, Mrs. Damas departed and Rachel was left alone. With her an idle morning had come to be so rare that she couldn't easily settle down to doing nothing. She sat down, obedient to the orders she received, and tried to close her eyes, but a man in the street began to play a barrel-organ, and with an exclamation of disgust she flew into the studio and shut the door behind her. Even there she could plainly hear the cracked and discordant strains—

“Wait till the clouds roll by, Jennie,
Wait till the clouds roll by.”

Peace was out of the question. She wandered restlessly about, took up her brushes and put a touch or two to the picture of herself, threw them down again, and finally dropped into a big chair, thinking over all that the old General had said the previous day. While she was still sitting there, lost in thought and yet full of a resolution to act according to the dictates of her head rather than her heart, the door was pushed very gently open and Harrington came in. Rachel did not hear him, so did not move

“Rachel,” he said softly.

She sprang up from her chair and faced him.

“Why have you come?” she cried, for she saw from the radiance and joy upon his face that something had happened.

He crossed the studio to her. “The General sent for me—sent me to you. He said that he had seen you, and that all was right,” he said eagerly. “Oh, Rachel! my love, my love, you have been hard upon me; just, I dare say, but very hard. And now that I have learned my lesson thoroughly, you are going to be kind to me,

are you not? Why—Rachel—you don't—you cannot mean that he was wrong—oh! no, no, you couldn't send me away again—you couldn't."

"The General came here," she said in a voice scarcely above a whisper, "and he pleaded your cause as well as if it had been his own. I could say nothing—nothing. He believes in you—he said that you were brave and frank and true—and—*good!* And what could I do but let him say aught that he pleased and answer nothing?"

All the radiance had faded out of his handsome face, and it grew as pale and full of pain as her own.

"Well?" he asked—"well?"

"He would not let me say a word, would not believe that I have made up my mind not to marry you. He wishes it, and what he wishes he believes will come to pass. But I never said one word that could justify him in sending you here—not one word."

"Do you mean that it is all no good, that you are still holding out against me?" he gasped.

"I shall always hold out against you," she answered.

"Oh, Rachel, how hard you are upon me," he cried. "How unforgiving to me."

"I forgave you long ago," Rachel said simply. "But forgiveness does not undo what is past and beyond alteration. When you have broken a beautiful vase, you may be forgiven for it, but the forgiveness does not make the vase whole again. It is just so with you and me—you broke the vase of my faith in you, and though I forgive you freely and fully, the damage remains just the same. Oh! don't you think," she went on passionately, "that I would if I could—don't you see and know that I love you still dearly? And yet if I were to marry

you, I know as well as I know that we two are standing here now, that after a very little while we should be further apart than if the whole world were between us."

"I should like to run the risk of that, darling," he said eagerly.

"No—I dare not do that, I dare not. I should begin by loving you, more perhaps than I have ever done—but I should never trust you, never. I should always be suspicious of what I dreaded would happen—I should see a wrong motive in everything that you said, in everything that you did. I should grow suspicious—you impatient. I wretched, perhaps even jealous—you—oh! don't let us talk about it. It can never come to pass. I tell you I would give half my life and all my fame to be able to believe in you as I did—before that awful day when you asked me to—to—become your mistress."

"But Rachel, dearest, is it nothing that I saw my folly and repented of it?"

"When you found that it had not won what you wished," she said significantly. "But if I had been weak—where should I be now? It is not your fault that I am Ray Dudley, the painter whom all the world is running after; if it depended upon you alone, I should only be General Vandeleur's outcast granddaughter."

"Perhaps so—I am willing and ready to acknowledge myself utterly and absolutely wrong," he said quickly. "You cannot blame me more than I blame myself—that is impossible. I suppose it is useless my stopping here to argue about the matter if you are so obdurate; so I will go—but remember, Rachel, if you send me away now, it shall be for the last time——"

"Yes, I know," she murmured faintly—"I would rather that you went at once."

Harrington began to feel less humble and repentant, and a great deal more angry—as long as there was anything to be gained by abasing himself, he could and under the circumstances cheerfully would grovel in dust and ashes and clothe himself in sackcloth; but as he found that there was nothing to be gained by it, his not very meek nature revolted and he became angry and rather defiant.

“If you send me away now, Rachel, it is for the last time, remember. I shall never seek you out again—and if I go headlong to the devil, you will always bear in mind, I hope, that it is your doing.”

“*My doing!*” she echoed.

“Yes—your doing,” he repeated fiercely. “In these days a man needs a good woman to keep him straight and stand between him and the world—I shall never try to marry any woman now. You could have done anything that you liked with me—I have always been like wax in your hands. Now it is all over—and when I go out of this, hopeless and wretched, with nothing to live for, nothing to keep me straight, I shall go headlong to perdition as fast as General Vandeleur’s liberal allowance will take me. The quicker I go to the devil the better I shall be pleased; and do you always bear in mind that it was you who sent me there.”

He turned as if to go, but Rachel, feeling strong and like herself again, began to speak, and fairly held him prisoner by the great scorn which thrilled her voice and blazed out of her big eyes.

“You come here,” she said—“you! a man, a lord of creation—and you threaten me, a weak woman, with your destruction—and why? Because you were not

able to accomplish mine ! I am ashamed of you, Valentine Harrington—more, I am ashamed of myself for having loved you. And I tell you that if when you leave me to-day, you deliberately cast yourself headlong to your ruin, the sin will not rest upon my head but on your own. You are not a child or a weak boy who does not know right from wrong—but a man in the very flower of your life. You come here and ask me to give my whole life into your keeping, you a man who can actually threaten me with your eternal destruction—oh, for shame, for shame !”

She paused for a moment, and he stood looking at her with his angry eyes shining from his white strained handsome face ; but he did not speak.

“If I have been hard upon you,” she went on, “remember that I have been equally hard upon myself. And I think, instead of speaking to me as you have done, you might feel some little gratitude to me for having borne many hard words from General Vandeleur for your sake. Remember I need not have borne them. I had only to speak to justify myself to him.”

“To speak ? About what ?” he cried.

“I had only to tell General Vandeleur of your engagement to me.”

“I was never engaged to you,” he blurted out.

Rachel looked at him incredulously for a moment, then a light seemed to dawn upon her.

“Now that I come to think of it,” she said slowly, “you were but too careful never to say one word to me which I could legally construe into a proposal of marriage. I was alone in the world, poor, almost nameless, at least unknown, when you met me at Bombay. And you—you only told me that you loved

me—you did not ask me to marry you! Yes, I see it all now. I see—I see! It behoves a man of honour to be very careful not to say one word which he may have to break in the letter, though he may ruin a woman's whole life and break her heart quite consistently with every requirement of honour! Yes, I see! And all this time I have been thinking too well of you—I thought that it was all real until your godfather began to put pressure upon you."

"Rachel, I assure you," he began, "you take a wrong view of all this. I——"

"Stay," she said, with great dignity. "I want to hear no more of your excuses. It was just this—love in one scale, money in the other, and money weighed the most. Let us say no more, for if we talk till crack of doom we shall think no differently. I have only one other thing to say. It is, let this be the last discussion between us on this subject. Let us close the book for ever—and mind, if you or my grandfather ever open it again, I shall have no choice but to justify myself to him. I shall not like doing it, but I shall not be able to help myself."

"I don't understand you," he said defiantly.

"Don't you? I think it is very clear," she answered. "Simply that I shall have to tell my grandfather why I refuse to become your wife. For all the rest, I have done."

"You would tell the General——"

"Not willingly. I have taken the blame up till now, because I wish you to be as you have been all your life, his heir. I would rather receive no money from him whatever, for I have no right to it. I told him so the other day—yesterday—this morning—what am I saying? I mean when he was here last. I begged him to make no change."

"And that is all you have to say to me?" he said, roughly.

"That is all."

"Very well—good-bye, Rachel."

"Good-bye, Valentine," she answered.

For one wild mad moment he stood looking fixedly at her, as if he was taking his farewell of her for ever; then he turned on his heel abruptly and went quickly out of the room.

Rachel took up her palette and brushes again; she was so dazed with the pain of acting up to her resolution that she could see neither the canvas nor the figure of herself upon which she had been at work when he came in. Nevertheless she painted blindly on for a few minutes, until indeed she heard the closing of the hall-door, which told her that Harrington was gone and that the romance of her life had come to an end for ever.

Then she flung down her palette and brushes and ran to the window to see him go—but, alas, the beautiful stained glass which filled the quaint Gothic window hid him from her sight and she could only discern a form, a shadow rather, pass along the pavement and disappear into the blaze of glory which flooded the street.

"So it is all over," she cried. "I have been true to myself, but oh, my God! how I love him still—how I love him still!"

She turned back to the picture again and went on painting with a vague kind of feeling that her work was all that she had left to live for, that in her work was her only chance of consolation. In truth, she was hurt, far more bitterly hurt than she had ever been before. Harrington's injudicious admission that he had been careful, during that happy homeward voyage,

not to actually engage himself to her, had done more to set her apart from him than everything which had gone before. She was wounded to the very quick, stung to the lowest depths of her heart, trembling still with the shame and the pain of it.

And yet she went on painting—washing her brushes out regularly enough in her saucer of turpentine, mixing her colours sensibly, looking at her reflection in the large glass, and then putting what she saw there on the canvas ; and yet, all like a girl in a dream.

After half-an-hour or so she found the effort too much, that her head was beginning to reel and her senses to feel numbed and dull ; then she put her palette down again and threw herself into a deep chair—not because she wanted to be idle and think, but solely because she was too much unnerved and shaken to be able to stand any longer.

And there for an hour she stayed motionless, until Mrs. Damas returned from her class.

“Dawdling, Ray ?” she cried gaily. “How have you got on to-day ?”

She walked straight across the room to the easel on which Rachel’s portrait stood.

“Why, Rachel, dearie !” she exclaimed, “what *have* you been doing ?”

“I have done nothing,” Rachel said, getting up from her seat and going to look at the picture. “I have been idle for hours,” and then she saw that during the little while in which she had been blindly painting in an attempt to keep her self-possession, she had put in lines about the girl’s mouth and eyes utterly out of keeping with the gay white gown and pretty blue ribbons and the gray kitten on her shoulder, giving

her an expression of hunted misery, which on looking in the glass she saw reproduced in her own strained white face. And besides this she had, by chance in her blind pain, let one of her brushes fall upon the picture and there lay a great crimson smear right across the heart.

For a moment she was almost too sick with pain to speak. "I have effectually done for myself," she said at last, trying hard to speak in her ordinary voice, though to her own ears even it sounded harsh and discordant—"There, let me put it away. I hate the thing; I shall never touch it again."

Mrs. Damas turned and looked at her. "Why, Rachel, my dear," she asked, "what is it?"

"I—I—" began Rachel.

"Has the General been here—or Harrington? Has anything happened to upset you?"

"To upset me?" cried Rachel, with a wild laugh.

"My dear, you are keeping something back from me—something which it would ease your mind to tell me," Mrs. Damas persisted. "What is it, Rachel? Tell me, my dear."

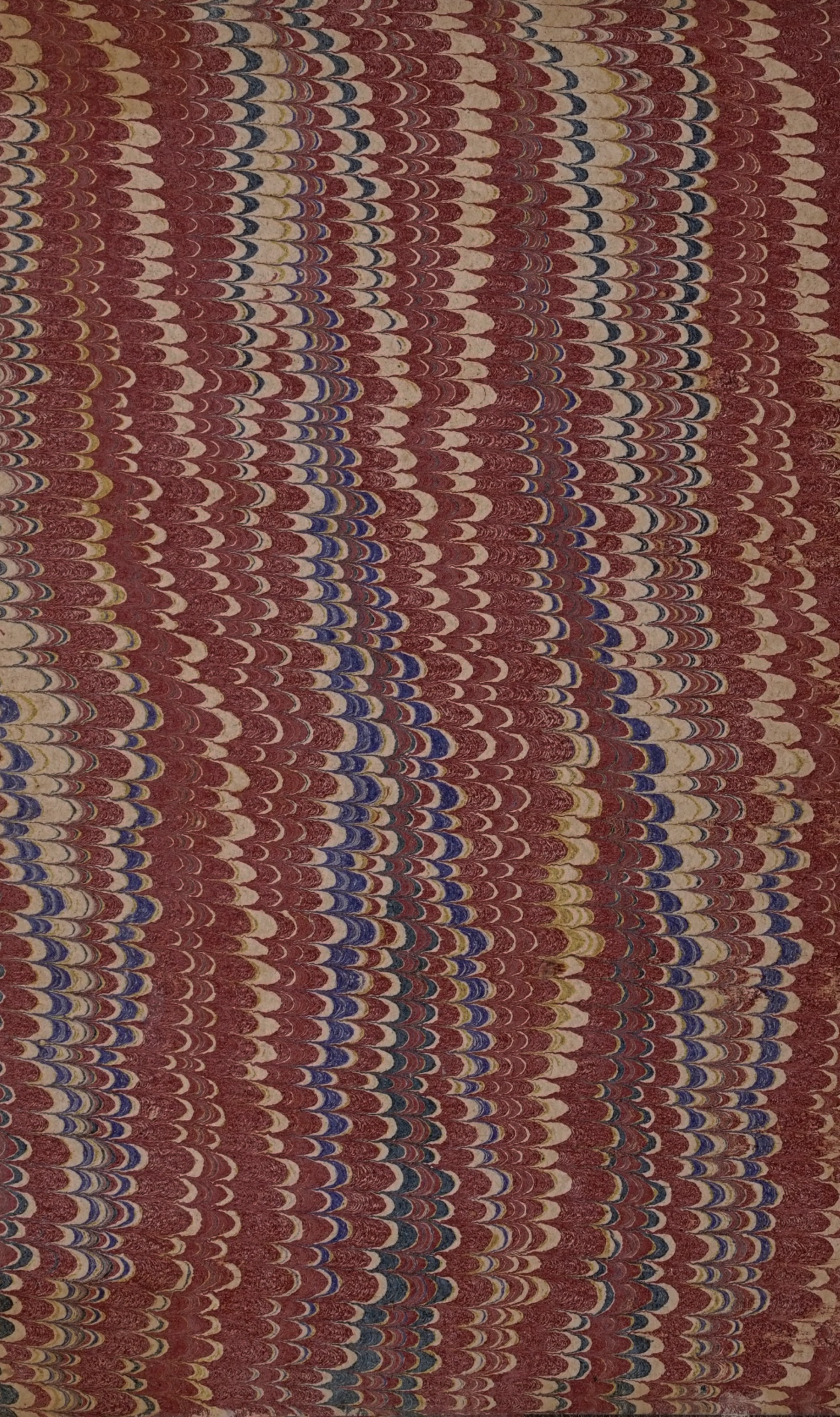
"I have never kept but one thing from you, Dorothy," said Rachel mournfully, "and that was the name of—of—*him*. It was Valentine Harrington."

"Dear heaven!" cried Mrs. Damas with blank amazement—"I have been as blind as a bat. Well—he has been here to day! And what has happened?"

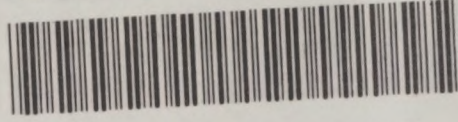
Rachel laughed nervously, and pointed to the crimson stain on the bosom of the girl in the picture.

"Just that!" she said. "I have done my best to be true to myself—and this is my harvest."





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